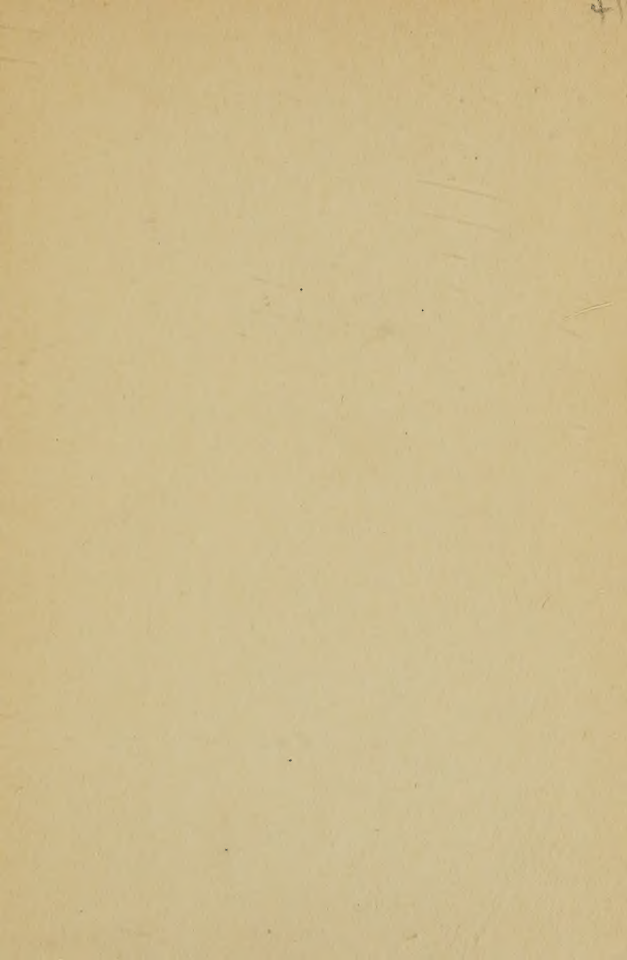


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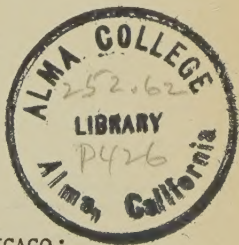


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MEDITATIONS
ON THE
Seven Words of Our Lord
ON THE CROSS.

BY
FATHER CHARLES PERRAUD.

With an Introduction and an Epilogue by
HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL PERRAUD,
Bishop of Autun,
Member of the French Academy.



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✠ MICHAEL AUGUSTINE,

Archbishop of New York

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To the Memory of
the dear Souls
who await me
before God.

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INTRODUCTION.

PARAY-LE-MONIAL,

February 19th, 1890.

The author of these Meditations has expressed his unwillingness to offer them to the public, unless under the episcopal recommendation of his elder brother. This sentiment of sacerdotal and fraternal deference does honor to his humility; but the approval will seem unnecessary to those Christians who, during the past ten years, made up the crowded and perseveringly faithful audiences at the Conferences of St. Ambrose, and during the Lenten services at the churches of St. Madeleine, St. Clotilde, St. Roch and Holy Trinity.

What they heard in these sermons, they wished to be able to read and ponder upon more at their leisure, and they requested the preacher to write, if not exactly that which he said and in the same form in which he uttered it, at least a *résumé* of the truths, to which they had so devotedly listened.

He believed that he should defer to their wishes, and determined to enter upon a task peculiarly difficult and painstaking, that of compiling into one work seven or eight different treatments of the same subject. Good Friday of every Lent, during ten years, had been the occasion of a new discourse on the words uttered on the Cross by the dying Saviour. Notes and stenographic reproductions of sermons had accumulated. But how could he reproduce these commentaries, equal in number to the circumstances in which they had been pronounced? Among so many developments given to the same text, a choice had to be made, some things omitted, and the rest collated as if they had sprung from a single inspiration, while in reality they were fragments of different dates, and had never been intended to form a single work.

To this task of patient labor, very meritorious for an orator, accustomed to pour forth his very soul to others under the pressure of his emotions, we are indebted for a book of Meditations, to which, without being prejudiced by a biased and almost compulsory good will, I predict a considerable success.*

There are, even in Christian philosophy and

* The public has taken upon itself to make good this prediction. In reprinting this volume, the author has been able to make some changes, before his death.—*Note of the Publisher.*

piety, special books which correspond to particular needs, situations and spiritual necessities, whence it follows that it is not sufficient that the author should have treated his matter well; it is also necessary that the book should not miss its mark, but go straight to the class of readers for whom it has been written.

The subject treated of in these Meditations is of universal utility. I say *universal* absolutely, without exception or distinction, for we are taught to go to the school of the dying Saviour to learn the science of suffering and the science of dying. What man in the world can say that he does not need to master these two sciences?

“The whole life of Christ,” beautifully remarks the author of the *Imitation of Christ*, in his chapter on the Royal way of the Holy Cross, “was a cross and martyrdom.*”

This is very true. But the last episode in the life of the Incarnate Word was so completely given up to suffering, that it has kept that name, and is now called simply “The Passion.” For it was then that all sorrows accumulated upon Him who came to expiate all iniquities. His body was crushed and almost annihilated. His soul was a prey to inexpressible desolation and anguish.

It was, indeed, impossible for Jesus to know

* *Imitation*, Book II., Ch. 12, No. 7.

despair,* for despair is a denial of the dogma of Providence, and, consequently, a sin. But in His adorable condescension and compassion for the misery of men, He wished to inflict on Himself the suffering of the despairing. He descended with them to the depths of the abyss, to raise them up and to preserve them by His grace from the final revolt that would consummate their damnation and eternal torments.

One of these moral sufferings has been dwelt upon by the author of these Meditations, with a depth, a fidelity to life and a power of emotion, of which they will receive the benefit (I have the consoling certainty), who, to a greater or lesser degree, have to struggle against the perilous temptation of doubt and discouragement. I mean the commentary on the cry of distress, uttered in the dark night of Golgotha, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Every sorrow may be borne by him whose soul is illumined by the light of faith and buoyed up by hope in God. But that which we may without exaggeration call "insupportable suffering and the veritable pains of Hell" is the affliction, which to the other causes of grief adds the darkness of the spirit and the despair of the heart. I do my-

* Heb. iv., 15. "He was tempted in all things like as we are, yet without sin."

self violence to refrain from quoting here in its entirety this passage so heartening and strengthening,* and I resist the temptation to offer a foretaste to the readers of these Meditations.

It is useful, it is even necessary, that they should be prepared to read the following pages by those which precede, so that they may understand them better, and make a more decisive application, either to their own personal needs or to the sorrows in which they will be called to be confidants and consolers.

When these pages shall be tasted in their austere and nutritive substance, who will not perceive the need of joining himself with the author to give thanks with him to the Saviour Jesus, "Who wished to sympathize with the sufferings of the poor creature who no longer sees anything, or knows anything, who counts on no one and expects neither remedy, nor solace, nor consolation?" Who will not bless Him for having, upon His cross, uttered a cry, the intensity of which will ascend higher than the voice of the despairing, and which until the end of time will be as a shield protecting from the vengeance of God human blasphemers? †

To learn how to suffer is an essential and a

* Fourth Meditation.

† See pp. 93 and 94.

very practical part of the science of life. It yields in importance, however, to another science more universally necessary; for some human beings, objects of an exceptional predestination, pay to grief only a slight and intermittent tribute; but even those whose lives have been of uninterrupted happiness cannot escape the obligation of dying. And this is why, by the golden pen of Plato, ancient wisdom formulated this rule of all reasonable life: "Philosophy is nothing but a training for death, and a participation of it."

This philosophy, however, is so energetically contradicted by natural instinct, which left to itself has such a horror of death, that purely abstract maxims would be powerless to make us undergo this training. We need not only the lessons but the examples of a master. The former, Christ gave us in His preaching; the latter is found in His passion, where He has confirmed by His agony and death the teachings of His life. To speak still more exactly, the Passion, and, above all, the supreme episode of the Crucifixion, contains both the theoretical teaching and the practical lesson; it embraces in the highest degree and in a complete way the science of dying well. For, it was in the very act of death, in the course of a terrible agony of three hours, that Jesus let fall from His lips seven words, which sum up, in

their divine brevity, all the parts of this master-science, without which the greatest genius of the world is lamentably ignorant compared to the lowly and simple who have learned from Jesus Christ how we must die. “As the seven notes of the musical gamut have sufficed from the beginning, and will suffice to the end of time to compose all the harmonies invented by human genius”, so the words of the dying Saviour are as an inexhaustible fountain of lights, graces and inspirations adapted beforehand to the most diverse ways and innumerable varieties of sufferings and death. “What reward and what joy is it for me”, says with a truly apostolic accent, the author of this book, “if these Meditations can aid some of my brethren and myself to die in the Saviour, on His Heart which has loved us so much, clasped in the arms which His incomparable devotedness has nailed to the Cross !”*

This wish, inspired as it is by such Christian and sacerdotal sentiments, will be fulfilled.

This book will increase the failing courage and strengthen the vacillating will, for it is full of the spirit and grace which St. Paul expressed, saying that one of the reasons why Christ wished to die was to deliver from their slavery those who live in a perpetual fear of death.

* See p 2

† Heb. ii., 12-

After having finished the reading of the manuscript of this book a thought came to me. I am going to state my idea simply, but it pertains to God to give it efficacy and fecundity.

I wish that Christians really worthy of the name would establish a kind of mutual assurance league against the fear of death, and also against those cowardly and murderous conspiracies of silence, which too often, even in families where religious habits are cultivated, decrown death of his austere majesty, and deprive the dying soul of the great merit of appropriating to himself and making his own by a thoughtful acceptance, following the example of Jesus Christ, a sacrifice which is inevitable and always repugnant to nature. I would ask the members of this society to have a meeting once a month. They would pass together some hours during which they could make a retreat preparatory to death. They should confess and communicate as though they were to receive for the last time the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. They could write or re-read their wills. Finally they should give or renew the promise to warn one another in case of a serious illness, so that they might give, by their timely advice, the pledge of a sincere and truly supernatural affection.*

* This idea is being successfully carried out in the parish of St. Roch, in Paris.

If I had to endow this association with a select library for the readings to be made in common at the monthly reunions, here is how I would like to compose it.

I would place in it the little work of Bossuet called *Preparation for death* and the sermon of Bourdaloue having the same title. The work of Bossuet is composed of eight prayers, furnishing at the same time subjects of meditation, followed by *An Exercise to dispose oneself to die well: Reflexions on the Agony of Jesus Christ*; and *A Discourse on Death*, addressed by the illustrious Bishop to the Religious of the Visitation of Meaux. I would then ask the heirs of Father Gratry for authority to publish in one small volume his admirable Meditation on Death and the last two chapters of his *Connaissance de l'âme* which have the significant titles *Autumn* and *Winter*. These chapters contain one of the most vigorous and eloquent exhortations on the subject of death that will ever be written by the pen of a Christian philosopher.

I would add the *Way of the Cross*, the beautiful meditation on the *Death of the Priest* and the *Day of an Invalid* by our dear Henri Perreyve, preceded by the preface in which our venerated Fr. Pététot has explained in language so pastoral the counsels which his long experience in the ministry suggested to him for souls desirous of

learning how to suffer well and die well. I would add to this collection the present volume, and finally the truly divine collection of the *Words of our Lord Jesus Christ*, from the four Gospels, republished seven years ago by the author of *Meditations on the Seven Words of Jesus on the Cross*.

To increase among Christians the knowledge and understanding of the thoughts and sayings of the Word made flesh, crucified for love of us, would surely make them invincible against the natural fear of death, and render them capable of meeting it with the noble assurance of the saints, who salute it as the looked-for dawn of the full light, the end of earthly slavery, the entrance into the royal and everlasting liberty of the children of God.

I bless with a benediction both fraternal and episcopal these *Meditations* and their author. I thank God that he has been permitted to write and publish this book, which I know he wished to make the last testament of his laborious and fruitful apostolate.

ADOLPHE LOUIS,

Bishop of Autun, Châlon and Mâcon.

P R E F A C E.

Man, created by God for happiness, had been preserved, by a supernatural privilege, from the painful necessity of dying. It was “by sin alone that Death entered into the world,*” “for God made not death,†” and He always insists on calling Himself “not the God of the dead, but of the living.‡”

But the law of death is not without consolation, as the grave is not without hope. Since we are intelligent and free beings, with the duty of never forgetting the inevitable dénouement, we have the privilege of knowing that death is not a conclusion, but a commencement. This is why the inspired writer of the Book of Ecclesiasticus exclaimed: “O Death! thy sentence is welcome.||” And elsewhere the Sacred Scriptures add: “It is

* Rom. v., 12.

† Wisdom i., 13.

‡ Mark xii., 27.

|| Ecclesiasticus xii., 3.

better to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting." *

Pagan wisdom itself, by the mouth of one of its most notable representatives, recommended to man a voluntary detachment from the present life and a constant forethought of the life to come. "Those who rightly apply themselves to philosophy seem to have left all others in ignorance, that philosophers aim at nothing else than to die and be dead In reality, then, those who pursue philosophy rightly study to die; and to them of all men death is least formidable." †

Besides, the Christian, "so far from finding in the thought of death a source of gloomy sadness, will rather discover in it the motive for a happy and active liberty." ‡

But, despite these generous exhortations, men try to forget death. It seems frightful to them, because they cannot see in it "the triumph of the soul and of immortality;" || and we can affirm without exaggeration that, when strangers to the habits and practices of the Christian life, nearly all avoid the thought of death with as much care as they should employ to prepare themselves for it.

* Ecclesiastes vii, 3.

† Phædo. Transl. H. Cary. London, 1852, pp. 60, 66. The French translation is taken from V. Cousin, I., 199 and 207.—*N.B.* of the translator.

‡ Henry Perreyve by Père Gratry, p. 192.

|| P. Lacordaire, *Conférences*, vol. I., p. 162.

However, we are all condemned to die, "sleeping or waking, we must at length arrive there and come out of our dreams when facing the eternal and unchangeable reality.* "

Jesus Christ, by dying with us and for us, has solved this difficult problem. During eighteen centuries, the Calvary where He expired towers aloft in the centre of humanity as the house of the greatest of all mournings; and this house of mourning has more attractions for the Christian than the house of feasting.

When the appearance of death troubles and disturbs us, a holy instinct turns us to our dying Lord. Before His Cross, we feel that we are no longer deserted; the sight of His agony comforts instead of grieving us; death in our eyes loses nearly all its terror and the excessive hardships we associate with it, when we see it fall, both victor and vanquished, upon Him of whom St. Paul could say: "He hath indeed destroyed death, and hath enlightened life and incorruption by the Gospel.† "

Since He subjected Himself to death together with us, the Saviour (if I may dare to speak thus) felt more justified in giving us His heroic commandments. "Be ye always prepared, for you

* L'Abbé Perreyve, *Journée des Maiades*, p. 5.

† II. Tim. I., 10.

know not the day or the hour. . . . Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more than they can do.* ”

But, above all, accompanying us on that sombre and terrifying journey, He who has said, “I am the light of the world,” must necessarily display to us there the sweet and reassuring effulgence of His presence.

Yes, indeed, since this prodigious event, since this unheard-of act of infinite mercy, the atmosphere of death has been changed, a kindly light has penetrated its shades, and even in his involuntary anguish, the Christian who departs from this life inhales in advance the first emanations of Heaven, the first breathings of the eternal life. United to Jesus Christ, we have no longer terror and desolation for our companions, but filial confidence and invincible hope. We no longer die in death, but we die in the Lord, and this is why the Apostle St. John has been moved to utter this cry of enthusiasm: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.† ”

Never shall we go sufficiently deep into the consideration of truths so consoling, and nothing will better aid us to understand them than meditation on the words which Jesus Christ pronounced upon

* St. Luke, xii., 4.

† Apocalypse, xiv., 13.

the Cross before His death. Together with the communion of the body and blood of Christ, these words ought to be a stimulating and divine cordial which will save us from falling, an all-powerful viaticum for the solemn voyage.

Having been invited many times to preach on the seven words of Christ on the Cross, it seemed to me when I pondered on them (more and more deeply) that their principal efficacy and their particular grace should be to inspire us with a great desire of making our death like to that of Jesus Christ. What a reward and what joy will it be for me if these Meditations can help some of my friends and myself to “die in the Lord” on His Heart which has loved us so much, and clasped in the arms which His incomparable devotedness nailed to the cross !

PRELIMINARY MEDITATION.

During the whole of a long night, the enemies of Jesus Christ have heaped the most revolting outrages upon the head of the ideal friend, the eternal benefactor of men.

He has been scourged, and on His innocent flesh the rods of the Roman soldiers have left long, bloody furrows. They have shown Him to the populace, first in the white robe of fools, then, clad in a miserable rag of purple, while for a sceptre they have placed a reed in His hand.

These cruel tormentors have invented for the Son of God a new kind of torture: they have encircled His adorable brow with a crown of thorns. Striking with redoubled blows upon this terrible diadem, they have driven in the sharp points until they have penetrated the very brain. In attacking their victim and wounding Him in this manner in the delicate fibres and the marvellous lineaments which are the sacred organ of thought, perhaps they hoped that Jesus would lose the free use of

His intelligence and would be rendered incapable of speech. Then they covered His eyes with a bandage and slapping Him with violence, they said to Him mockingly: "Christ, prophesy and tell who it is that struck you." The Saviour answered them not, but, each time that the rude hand of a soldier bruised His cheek, in His Heart He said: "He who struck me is one of those whom I love and for whom I am going to die in order to make them love me."

Even this was not enough and it was necessary, according to the words of Isaias, that the Son of God should become, for love of us, "despised, and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows.*"

Listen, Christians, to this verse of the Gospel which we should not read without bowing our heads to the ground, and in a sort of awe and consternation. "Then they did spit in His face.†" "The face formerly so majestic," says Bossuet, "that ravished in admiration heaven and earth, He presents firm and motionless to the blows of this rabble.‡"

We hardly dare to fix our mind on these abominations and we cannot endure even the thought of them, so much do they offend our delicacy, but

* Isaias, LIII., 39. Mark, IX., 11.

† St. Matthew, XXVI., 67.

‡ First Sermon on the Passion of Christ.

though the mere recollection of them disgusts us, Jesus endured their horrible reality.

Ah! if Christ were only a man justly condemned to death for claiming equality with God, such an excess of ignominies would have wrung from him a protestation, a cry of anger. But nothing could alter the sweetness of the Lamb of God. Nay, His love increased in proportion to the crimes of His tormentors, and as they redoubled their fury against Him, His desire of pardoning them grew even to the infinite.

Foolish Jews! you wished to prevent the Word from speaking; you hoped, O enemies of your greatest friend, that your tortures would almost annihilate Him and that an eternal silence would fall upon this miserable, dishonored outcast. But behold! the very excess of His sufferings will give to His last accents a more irresistible power and a more triumphant efficacy. For the living God has graciously consented "to taste death*" in order to aid us to endure its bitterness, but to His very last breath, He wishes to maintain the sovereignty of thought and the honor of speech.

Neither your outrages, nor your perfidies, nor your cruelties can prevent Him from loving men, and by His love, from saving them. Soon, from His gibbet, the great *Messenger of Good Tidings*,

* Epistle to the Hebrews, II., 9.

will preach with an incomparable authority. Crucified, agonizing, dying, He will speak unutterable things in accents which mankind in all ages will hear and treasure up with adoration.

Doubtless, the intensity of the sufferings He endures, and the constant loss of His blood, by dissipating His strength, have rendered His words less frequent and His voice more feeble. But just as in a family, the members approach as near as possible to the dying one and bend over him to catch the last words he tries to articulate, even so Christians kneel at the foot of the Cross and listen eagerly to the last recommendations and the tender adieus of the dying Christ.

For it seems that in the solemn testament of His love, the Saviour, redoubling His compassion for our miseries, wished to mitigate the too lively impression of severity that some of His preceding words might have produced in our souls. Entering Himself upon the sorrowful combat with death, He feels an increased pity for humanity condemned to die, and forgetting all the rest, He thinks of nothing else than of consoling and reassuring us by His prodigies of pardon and miracles of mercy.

Besides, I do not fear to affirm, constant meditation on the seven words of Jesus on the cross would suffice to convince those who do not believe.

to console those who suffer, to give hope to the despairing, but above all to transfigure our death.

These blessed words form, as it were, the peroration of all His discourses. The divine orator wished to concentrate there the last rays of light, the irresistible accents, the grand strokes of eloquence which penetrate the heart, stir the will, and gain decisive victories.

We read in the Old Testament that when David sang before Saul, accompanying himself with his harp, the sombre melancholy of the King was dissipated, and the melodies of the inspired artist dispelled from his morbid brain mysterious fears and dismal hallucinations.

Thus the Saviour of men, to lull their sufferings, to soothe their agonies, and to beguile their death, has made of his last words a celestial melody, to which nothing here below can be compared. By I know not what singular predestination, what secret counsel, it happens that from the Cross only seven words resounded, just as there are but seven notes in music. Now, it is the musical gamut, so restricted in its immensity, whose inexhaustible combinations have served from the beginning and will serve to the end of time to compose all the harmonies invented by the genius of men. In their infinite richness, these seven notes have sufficed to convey all our sentiments, all our

aspirations, all our dreams, the ecstasy of religion, the hymns of victory, the desolation of days of mourning, as well as the delight of days of gladness. Let us listen with profound religious attention to the seven divine notes, which the dying voice of Christ has sent down the centuries, beyond the utmost limits of space, and which will bear, even to the remotest depths of eternity, the vibrations of the infinite love.

Let us hasten, for the thoughtless and criminal have destroyed piece by piece the master-work that the very breath of God miraculously formed in the womb of the purest and happiest of women; for the marvellous instrument is soon to be broken.

If the words of a God are always the light, the consolation and the strength of man, the words of a God who is about to die to save him have the intensely saddening but irresistible charm, the incomparable power to move of the voice of the dying.

FIRST MEDITATION.

THE APOGEE OF MERCY.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." LUKE, XXIII., 34.

How admirable and touching is this first word spoken by Christ at the beginning of His torment. What a sweet and reassuring surprise for sinners like us to see that the Son of God, at the very moment when He is nailed to the cross, utters no cry of pain, breathes not a word of complaint, but hastens to intercede in favor of the criminals for whom He fears the chastisements of the eternal justice !

And, in fact, if you read with attention the passage of St. Luke which records this merciful speech, you will remark that it follows immediately after the verse where it is said that Jesus was crucified in the place called Calvary.

O my Saviour ! even in this horrible suffering thou forgettest thyself and thinkest only of protecting and defending us. Despite the terrible pain of the nails which they have driven in with hammer strokes, and which pierce thy hands and

feet, not a groan falls from thy trembling lips ; but from thy broken heart there ascends to thy Father the most tender, most impassioned, most pressing supplication.

Whoever has experienced sharp physical suffering or has undergone a painful operation knows that it is almost impossible not to allow oneself to be absorbed and, as it were, annihilated by the intensity of pain ; almost impossible to forget one's own misfortune and not attend to the terrible sensation which dominates all and before which it seems that the whole world disappears.

On the contrary, Christ has but one anxiety, and one fear. He apprehends for His tormentors the indignation of His Father. His generous intervention is like a shield raised above the head of his enemies to prevent the fire of heaven from blasting them. Such is the heroic impatience of the rescuer, the sollicitude and anguish of the father who is anxious to snatch his son from danger, the spontaneous and sublime elan of him who sees the sword on the breast of his friend and rushes to avert the blow.

Did He not say to Peter in ordering him to restore his sword to its scabbard : " Thinkest thou that I cannot ask my Father, and He will give me presently more than twelve legions of angels.* "

* Matthew, xxvi., 57.

And does He not seem to fear that even by this simple expression He may be thought to have entertained the intention of appealing to the justice of God?

O Jesus! Thou offerest us as the first fruits of thy holocaust; the first flower of thy martyrdom. Thou art unwilling that a single moment of thy crucifixion should belong to any others than to the ingrates and criminals whom thou hast resolved to save. When we see the poor Crucified One forgetting His own sufferings and thinking no more of Himself, for no other reason than to preserve His tormentors from the vengeance of Heaven, are we not constrained to utter the touching words the Church sings before the crib: "Who would not love him who has loved us so much?"

Let us try, moreover, as far as it is possible to the feeble intelligence of man, to measure the extent and penetrate the depths of this merciful supplication. There is, in truth, the *résumé* of the whole work of the Redemption, the apogee of infinite mercy, the last imaginable limit of pardon.

Let us admire the unheard-of effort by which the eternal advocate of men* tries, at the last moment, to obtain from the sovereign Judge the acquittal of those criminals whose bad faith and cruel perfidy are patent to all eyes. "They know not what they

* Epist. to Hebrews, VII., 95.

do." Dost Thou say this, O God of goodness! But they knew very well that their accusations were unjust; for, to condemn Thee, they were reduced to the lowest, the most degrading of all means, and by their gold they suborned false witnesses.

Why! For three years, Thou hast not ceased to instruct the ignorant, to console the unfortunate, to cure the sick; never were they able to find Thee erring either in Thy acts or Thy words, and yet Thou excusest them, Thou intercedest in their behalf, and Thou affirmest that they were ignorant. But even supposing, though my mind shrinks from it, that they believed they were condemning a guilty man, is it not infamous to torture him so? To punish a criminal, to inflict on him even the death penalty, is what human justice has been obliged to do in every country and in every age, and what we see, alas! too frequently done before our eyes. But to insult him, to buffet him, to spit in his face, passes all bounds, and does not deserve in the slightest degree even the shadow of an excuse. Moreover, the proof of their infernal machination and of this odious satisfaction of private hatred, which has nothing in common with the legitimate exercise and regularity of justice, is furnished us by the history of this sorrowful drama. Together with Jesus, two criminals were crucified

in the same place and at the same time. Why did they not inflict on them the outrages which were heaped upon the Son of God? O God! (if thou allowest me the boldness of such a thought) it seems to me that thy heart has led thee too far away, and that thou hast imitated those advocates who seek the honor of having their clients acquitted, even though they know them to be guilty. But it is as God that thou spokest this word which my human reason and conscience fail to understand and I would be foolish not to make the strictness of my reasonings yield to the merciful secrets of thy divine intellect.

Must we not believe now that in this unique moment in history, the divine goodness overflows, so to speak, its banks, and seems to extend wider than the infinite?

This is not only the perfection of goodness and mercy, but almost their divine excess. It is not only love come to its farthest limits, it is love that surpasses itself and no longer knows any rules. And why shall I not dare to say with St. Paul that it is love carried even to folly, yes indeed, to the folly of the cross.*

If the excuse which thou urgest in favor of thy persecutors seems improbable, that which is more incredible still and which should prostrate all men

* Henry Perreye, by Père Gratry, p. 292.

at the foot of thy cross in an ecstasy of adoration and in tears of thankfulness, is the love which, together with the pardon thou askest for the criminals, thou offerest them to crown it.

But what authority will this supplication have, and can culpable humanity (for it was the entire human race Jesus had in view) hope that the sovereign Judge will allow himself to be convinced and touched by the eloquence of our generous and compassionate advocate? Able as his plea is, it is still necessary to move him who is to pronounce the sentence of acquittal or condemnation.

Ah! if we had not an invincible faith in the divinity of Jesus Christ, our enthusiasm and admiration for the greatest and holiest of men, would not suffice to reassure us. For, after all, God is not obliged to hear all the prayers of the saints. But what confidence ought not we to have in the prayer and intercession of a God. There indeed is it true to say that our faith saves us, and that we ought to apply the touching words which the Abbé Perreyve uttered a few days before his death: "Ah! How good it is to be a Christian. I have never before felt it to such a degree."

One day the Saviour was about to perform the most striking of all His miracles. By the sepulchre in which Lazarus had lain for four days, before ordering his soul to re-enter his body and raise it

up in the energy of perfect health, Christ lifted His eyes to Heaven and said to His Father: "Father, I give Thee thanks that Thou hast heard me."* Then He adds the words which He alone in Heaven and on earth has the right to utter; "I know well that Thou hearest me always, and if I have spoken in this way, it is because of the people who listen to me, in order that they may believe that Thou hast sent me."

In these words Jesus affirms that His Father hears all the prayers which He addresses to Him and He knows this because "He and the Father are one."† But where is the father, who, having always loved his son tenderly, would not try, with more eagerness and order than ever, to satisfy all his desires, to carry out all his wishes, when this son is dying?

Moreover, the all-powerfulness of Christ's intercession is a necessary and indubitable consequence of His divine character. But, by a device of His great mercy, Jesus, who had so often affirmed His divinity during His life, wished to multiply more than ever the proofs of His Godhead, in the very midst of the ignominies of His Passion and the distress of His crucifixion. I do not know if the work has been done already, but I think that independ.

* John, XI., 42.

† John, X., 30.

ently of the rest of the Gospel, one could cause as many rays of glory to encircle the pathetic account of Christ's death as crown the triumph of His resurrection itself.

Lèt us at least admire here the manifestly divine character of the last prayer of the dying Saviour. Other men and, above all, the holiest among them, at the approach of the solemn departure, when the light of Eternity dawns, discover in the recesses of their hearts, sins which they never saw before, and which cause them to say with David: "If Thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand it?"* Though they tremble before the infinite justice and holiness of which they feel themselves unworthy; though they all, and I say it to the honor of human nature, are unwilling to die without having humiliated themselves, acknowledged their short-comings, and asked pardon of God and men; Jesus had nothing to confess or implore for Himself. He who had said "Learn of me because I am weak and humble of heart,"† did not abase Himself. Was it due to lack of humility? No; but even in the excess of His mercy and in the anguish of His tortures, He is filled and, as it were, overflowing with the sovereign consciousness of His divinity. Just as the sun darts his

* Psalms, CXXIX., 3.

† St. Matt., XI., 29.

rays upon the earth, and bathes the world in sunshine, without receiving or expecting anything in return, the dear Son of God, who is about to die, from His heart lets fall upon men very torrents of mercy.

His soul is carried away in great desires for pardon, and dreams of wonderful goodness, and He asks for all pardon without limit.

You remember that one day when He was jostled on all sides by a rough though enthusiastic multitude, a sick woman having touched Him without His seeing it, He cried out: "Somebody has touched me, for I know that virtue is gone out from me."* Then it was the divine virtue of curing which radiated from all His person. Upon the cross, it is a virtue more divine still, the virtue of pardon, which exhales from His heart; but He who is the principle of all life and the source of all holiness, has no need of either cure or pardon. Henceforth, my dear Saviour, each time that I shall recite the only prayer which thou hast taught us, but above all, when at my last hour I shall pray to God, according to thy command, "Our Father who art in Heaven. . . forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," I shall remember with profound joy and in a happy sense of security, that thou alone wert able

* Luke VIII., 46.

and willing to die without asking pardon. In order that I may die in peace, despite so many faults which have sullied my soul, the certitude of thy love is not sufficient; I need in addition the certitude of thy divine power.

It is important, also, for us to recall that the grace which Jesus on the cross implores from His Father is precisely that which the Father wishes to grant us, for, according to the explicit words of St. Paul, "God wishes all men to be saved."* And did not the prophets of the Old Law represent the Lord to us as a father who requires and who awaits with a sort of restless impatience the intercession of the just in favor of sinners.† "And I sought among them for a man that might set up for a hedge, and stand in the gap before me in favor of the land, that I might not destroy it, and I found none." God cannot indeed allow His commandments or the rules of His justice to fall into contempt, but His love searches for and wishes to find a plausible reason for pardoning.

Since, therefore, it is asked by the dying Christ and desired by His Father, will not this pardon be accorded to men?

I answer without hesitation: yes, if they consent to ask it; no, if they disdain or spurn it. It is the

* Tim., II., 4.

† Ezech., XXII. 30.

magnificent but dreadful dignity of human liberty, to be able to resist the entire world and, if it so please it, struggle against Omnipotence itself. "Nothing," admirably says Fénelon, "will be able to force the impenetrable intrenchments of a free human heart."* Yes, unfortunately, the spirit can resist the light and the heart can shut itself out from love.

God shows himself clearly everywhere, to use the very expression of St. Paul, in the splendors of creation as well as in the government of the world.† If it please me, I may be blind to the evidence of the divine action, I may place myself as a judge of the Infinite, I may declare that God does not exist, since He is incomprehensible, and, preferring the absurd mysteries of atheism to the luminous mysteries of reason, I may admit a world which made itself, and matter to which I may attribute the intelligence belonging only to a spirit, and the eternity belonging to God alone. Though my soul is not less clearly distinguished from the life of my body than is God from the life of the world, I may make use of my soul to deny the very existence of my soul. I may abuse my liberty to deny my liberty. Others go farther still in the blind audacity and insolent boldness of their

* Discours pour le sacre de l'électeur de Cologne.

† Rom., I., 20.

revolt. Not content with denying God, they hate Him, and whilst the incredulity of the eighteenth century said, "If God were not existing, He ought to be invented," they say, "If God were existing, we ought to declare a merciless war upon Him."

Did not the Saviour Himself speak of these men, who deliberately prefer darkness to light, and did He not add that this shocking predilection comes from the fact that their works are evil? *

But let us who are Christians, who have the consciousness of our responsibility, and who at the sight of our transgressions cannot prevent ourselves from fearing the sentence of the eternal and infallible justice, betake ourselves to the protection of these blessed words. Not only do we accept, but we desire ardently the forgiveness without which we well know that we cannot arrive at salvation. And which of us, when he perceives his unworthiness, when he tries to enumerate the faults of his life, is not tempted to cry out as the Apostle St. Peter at the sight of a miracle of Christ: "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man." †

And does not the Catholic Church, inspired by God, also wish her ministers, in the very prayers of the Mass and in presence of the people, to pro-

* John., III., 19.

† Luke, v., 8.

claim themselves unworthy, humbly to confess their sins and to implore pardon for them with a wonderful insistance.*

But for God to have mercy on us, it is not sufficient that we feel humble and repentant for our faults, another condition is indispensable: our offences shall not be forgiven unless we pardon those who have offended us.

Because we are miserable, we have need of the divine pity, but because God wishes us to be noble, He orders us to give to our brethren all that we receive from Him.

But shall we place any limit to this pardon? No! for Christ says: "*To seventy times seven times,*" † that is to say "*always*" and again, "*your brother,*" that is to say "*all men,*" since they are descended from the same father and the same mother as we are.

But if it is God who has been offended, will we not have the right and the duty of exercising a severe justice? By no means; even then we ought to say with Jesus on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And

* On six different occasions he who ascends the altar of the living God, be he priest, bishop, archbishop or Pope, asks pardon for his iniquities. To make this confession even more visible to the faithful and his accusation more remarkable, to the words he adds a gesture and strikes his breast in asking pardon.

† Matt., xviii., 22.

when the bad faith, the perfidy, the premeditation of these wicked men will be clearly evident, and will not allow us any doubt, in default of personal conviction we will utter the sublime prayer in the name of Jesus Christ: What do we hazard by repeating the words of infinite truth or by taking from the heart of Him who is about to die, a spark of His love to warm and soften ours?

It is a privilege and a duty, too often overlooked or neglected by Christians, to intercede with God for criminals who violate His laws and outrage Himself. By prayer, by good works, and much more by the acceptance of suffering in a spirit of faith, the least among us can exercise a wonderful apostolate and contribute to the salvation of a great number of souls.

Let us be humble and we will become compassionate; let us have a horror of our sins and instead of being so indignant at the sins of others, we will say in favor of our brethren, unfortunate sinners like ourselves, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

Let us not fear to enter with Jesus into the mortal sadness and inexpressible anguish which He felt in the Garden of Olives, in contemplating in all their horror the crimes which dishonor mankind and stain the earth with human blood. It is precisely because the Saviour measured the depth

of the abyss, that He took pity on our misfortune, and begged His Father to save us from it.

Let us endeavor to imitate the zeal and the charity of St. Paul writing to the Romans these astonishing and sublime words: "I speak the truth in Christ, I have great sadness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I wished myself to be an anathema from Christ for my brethren.*

Poor beings, fallen but repentant, let us implore pardon for ourselves, but let us ask it, if possible, with more fervor still for other men. Has not the Saviour said that "it is more blessed to give than to receive," † to save than to be saved?

Considered from this point of view, which is the true one, the religion of Christ appears manifestly divine and of such wonderful sweetness that the Saviour Himself could not refrain from exalting it, when He said "Learn of me that my yoke is sweet and my burden light." ‡

Ah! if men were but willing to understand that love is the very foundation of Christianity, they would not hesitate at the difficulties which embarrass their spirit. While incredulity questions the supernatural truths of Revelation, it is certain that it has not succeeded in opposing to us a single

* Rom., ix., 1-3.

† Acts, xx., 35.

‡ Matt., xi., 29-30.

insoluble difficulty. But, however, who is the guardian of truth who has not sometimes groaned at being unable to give forth in a more victorious manner the ensemble of the proofs which give him personally a conviction that cannot be shaken? Who is the apostle who at certain times has not suffered from the treachery of his memory, the insufficiency of his erudition and the weakness of his speech? Yes, alas! the very same man who would die willingly to attest his faith can fail miserably in the effort he makes to communicate it to others. Leaving aside all controversy, let them say: My friends, my brothers, we are all miserable sinners, but God, our Father, has pitied our weakness and taken compassion on our sorrowful trials; Jesus Christ wished to die upon the cross to obtain pardon for our faults. What objection can be brought against Him?

The whole Gospel can be summed up in this word of ravishing sweetness, by which Jesus, in the beginning of His preaching, anticipated the prayer of His crucifixion: "If you forgive men their offenses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you your offenses."* You said a moment ago: I cannot be a Christian because I cannot possibly believe; I now say to you: Become humble, learn how to confess your wrongs and ask

* Matt., vi., 14.

pardon of God, be good, forgive your fellow-men and you will become a Christian.

Ah! how easy it is to pardon when one feels deeply the need of pardon for himself! Let us hope only in the infinite mercy, and, to obtain it, let us ask above all from God the grace of becoming and remaining always more and more merciful.

Why can I not gather and assemble at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ, in a sentiment of adoration and gratitude, those whom I know and those whom I do not know, those who dwell in my own land and those who live at the other end of the world, the men of past ages and those of the years to come, to cover myself and them with this divine mantle of pardon!

At the moment of appearing before the sovereign Judge, the humble and sincere friends of Christ thrill with a great hope in hearing resound for the last time the echo of the dear voice that said on Calvary: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!"

SECOND MEDITATION.

THE HEAVENLY CONVERSATION.

"Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise." LUKE, XXIII., 43.

Jesus crucified had not enemies alone as witnesses of His punishment. At His feet, He saw the three beings whom He loved the most: His mother, Magdalen the heroic penitent, now His privileged friend, and John, His disciple of predilection.

But while His enemies overwhelmed Him with their pitiless raillery and their cowardly blasphemy, the Gospel does not record a single word addressed to uplift and console the Saviour, by a mother so tender, a worshipper so passionate, and a friend so faithful. Intimately united to, and, as it were, identified with the sacrifice of her son, Mary remains mute, Magdalen is bathed in tears, and John seems to have fallen into a stupor that takes from him all energy and stops the words upon his lips.

Such is the terrifying effect that extreme sym-

pathy produces in souls in the presence of very great grief. In this way the friends of Job, hastening to inform him of the misfortunes which had fallen upon him, remained in his presence a whole week without one of them daring to speak a single word to him. They were awe-struck and mute at the sight of such misfortune, and, as it were, stricken by the same thunderbolt that shattered their friend.

O most holy Mother of God, will you not find for your well-beloved some words of motherly love, as caressing and sweet as those you formerly used to murmur in His ear, when, covering Him with kisses, you lulled Him to sleep in your arms. Does not the inexpressible anguish of His agony, even more than the weakness of His infancy, need tenderness and compassion?

O Magdalen, you who washed with your tears the feet of your divine friend, and, unbinding your hair, covered them with a golden nimbus, are you forgetful that He has loved your adoration, justified your importunity and glorified your sublime boldness? Will you not dare something further still, will you have for Him who is about to die no protestation of love, no élan of pity?

O John, you who rested your head so familiarly upon the breast of the Master at the sorrowful and solemn farewell supper; can you not find any word

of affection for Him, can you neither thank Him, nor address a prayer to Him?

No. Nothing is to break this mysterious and sad silence. It is necessary, undoubtedly, to satisfy all the demands of divine justice, that the willing victim die without hearing a kind word or receiving the least consolation.

When Jesus has begun the hymn of His death and ours, by the unspeakable strophe of infinite pardon, will no voice lift itself on the part of humanity to echo the celestial melody? Will the earth, bedewed with the blood of its Saviour, answer the protestation of His love, only by the incoherent cries, the cruel mockeries of the crowd, a dreadful tumult that hurts the ear and saddens the heart?

In the Garden of Gethsemane, when, at the very limit of His powers, the agonizing Saviour cried out: "My soul is sad even unto death", Heaven was attentive to such a plaint, an angel (Oh! if we but knew his name, how we would call upon him in our distresses!) an angel came to comfort Him. And meanwhile, in this strange silence of friends and in this apparent indifference of Heaven, when neither the mother nor the angel consented to speak, it is a criminal who alone and in the name of humankind raises his voice.

Listen, Christians, with all the admiration and tenderness of which you are capable, to this incom-

parable dialogue, this heavenly conversation, which is to be engaged in by two victims expiring side by side upon the cross.

What an extraordinary scene, what a sublime tragedy! When I consider how eager men are for novel emotions, how curious for new, untried, unheard-of situations; when I see them by turns startled, moved, bewildered, and, almost, beside themselves, when turning the pages of a novel or assisting at the production of a purely imaginary drama, I am unable to understand their inattention and indifference in regard to the touching episodes of the life and death of Christ.

“There were,” says the Gospel of St. Luke, “on the right and on the left of the Saviour, two criminals crucified with Him. But one of the two blasphemed Him, saying: ‘If Thou art Christ, save Thyself and us with Thee.’ The other, the repentant one, said to his companion: ‘Have you no fear of God, you who are condemned to the same punishment?’ Then turning his head toward Jesus he added: ‘Remember me, Lord, when you come to your kingdom.’ And Jesus answered him: ‘Amen, I say to you, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise.’”

We have not to meditate here upon this admirable exhortation addressed by him whom tradition has glorified as the *good thief*, to his companion

in misery, nor to try and discover what were its consequences. * All our attention should be concentrated on the prayer which the repentant criminal addressed to the Saviour, and upon the reply of Jesus.

Never, perhaps, did a conversation so short contain so many things and open up such broad horizons. Never, perhaps, did a single human speech merit such admiration, nor a divine one such gratitude.

Jesus said one day to the chiefs and the ancients of the people: "Publicans and sinners shall precede you in the Kingdom of Heaven." † Could this astounding prophecy have been realized in a more striking manner, than in Mary Magdalen prostrate at the foot of the cross, and in this criminal for whom Bossuet bears witness that "Jesus, abandoned by all the world, is exalted by him alone." ‡ "It was fitting that Christ, struck by God and bruised for our sins," || should preserve in His defeat the glory of a conqueror, and that He should have before His eyes, to His very last breath, these two marvellous conquests of His love, these living witnesses of the divine victories of grace over sin.

* See Note I. at the end of this volume.

† St. Matt., xxi., 31.

‡ *Sermon sur les souffrances*, first point.

|| Isaias, LIII., 4-5.

All the virtues which make saints, faith, hope and charity, like a flame which makes a passage for itself through the hardest granite, entered the soul of this great sinner. And while the cross of his revolting companion, incredulous blasphemer, will appear to us unto the end of time sorrowful and deserted, his own is, in our eyes, encircled by a celestial aureole, and all Christian generations will seek in his simple and sublime prayer a model of encouragement.

What were the antecedents of this criminal? Was he a Jew or a Pagan, or did he believe in the Gospel? Had he already met Christ before seeing Him crucified at his side, or did they not meet until made companions by a common disgrace, and the infliction of the same punishment? We can know nothing about it. What ever it may be, I do not think that there can be found an example of more generous, more living, more heroic faith. "I am full of joy," exclaims Bossuet, "my heart is ravished when I see the faith of this good thief. Dying, he sees Jesus die, and asks life from Him, crucified, he sees Jesus crucified and speaks of His Kingdom; his eyes see only crosses and his faith represents them as thrones."

His Kingdom! Is that your thought, poor senseless one? But he whose protection you im-

plore and whose favors you solicit is as simple, as naked and as abandoned as yourself.

His Kingdom! Ah! 'tis true, but now this sovereign carried in his hand a reed sceptre, and on his head you see still a crown of thorns. The two arms of the cross mark out the extent of his possessions and the limits of his empire. To see the majesty of so sad a King subjects will not be numerous, and his court in all probability will always be deserted.

Do you not know, moreover, that he has always been miserable and that he himself, humbly avowed his misery. "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." *

Do you believe him to be richer to-day? And as to his power, he scarcely gives any proofs of it. Did you not hear, a short while ago, how the crowd of Jews cried to him in a mocking tone and an insolent voice: "If thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross?" You see clearly that he is no more able than yourself to take the nails out of his hands and feet and resume his place among the living. If he were a King, would his subjects let him die like a slave? Would not the chiefs of his army, the guards of his palace, the servants of his house run in crowds to deliver him?

* Matt., VIII., 20.

No doubt these terrible objections presented themselves to the mind of this poor unfortunate ; and who better than he could measure the infinite distance that separates from the privileges of power and the splendors of royalty, the ignominious death and the atrocious punishment of crucifixion ?

Besides he was not there when Christ replied to Pilate : “ My Kingdom is not of this world. If my Kingdom were of this world, my servants would certainly strive that I should not be delivered to the Jews : but now my Kingdom is not from hence.” * The two criminals who were to be crucified the same day as He were still in their dungeons when Christ in the course of His examination said : “ Thou sayest that I am a King.” † They could not know that at the last supper the Saviour had made to His apostles this blessed promise : “ And I appoint to you, as my Father hath appointed to me, a Kingdom. That you may eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom.” ‡

Whence could come to this unexpected consoler, such superior intelligence, such supernatural intuition, such a detachment from earthly things, so marvellous a divination ? Why did not

* John, xviii., 36.

† John, xviii., 37.

‡ Luke, xxii., 29-30.

the sight of such misery shake his faith, and what sign is upon the pale face of his companion, that makes him recognize the glory of the divinity?

Doubtless one could seek and find many reasons; I prefer rather to dwell upon a single one which seems to me the most decisive and which touches me the most: "For with the heart," says St. Paul, "we believe unto justice." * This is how, in my opinion, the marvellous transformation of his soul was effected. Since he could have heard, that he might reproach him, the cruel words which the other criminal addressed to Christ, more probably did he hear Christ intercede with His Father for His tormentors and implore their forgiveness. I say more probably, since the cross of Christ was erected between the two others.

As two contrary electricities which meet, rebound and give forth a thunder flash, the cry of insult and the merciful prayer met above his head, flashed, and the flash entered his heart, whence the light ascended to his mind. Then by one of the sudden returns which divine grace can operate in every man of good will, the miserable sinner leaped in a single bound over incalculable distances, and without transition passed from crime to saintliness.

* Rom., x., 10.

Nor do I admire less the sublime flight of the soul which St. Paul eloquently calls "the glory of hope." * He seems to forget his atrocious sufferings, and at the approach of the fatal denouement, we do not perceive in his attitude the slightest trace of fear. His very crimes do not seem to cause him any apprehension. It is because instead of contemplating death and considering himself, he contemplates and considers nothing else than the all-powerful Redeemer, and the source of eternal life.

Ah ! beyond a doubt, we also can and ought "to perceive God beyond the valley of Death." † As for him, more fortunate, he sees God even before leaving this earth, and in this dazzling vision everything else is effaced and disappears from his eyes. Veritable favorite of death, he is like a man who, by divine permission, in place of resting in the obscurity and coldness of night when the sun has disappeared, attaches himself to it as an inseparable satellite, and finds himself happy in the other hemisphere, without having lost a single one of its rays.

When St. Paul said : " And now there remain, faith, hope and charity, these three : but the greatest of these is charity," ‡ he did not intend

* Heb., III., 6.

† Henry Perreyve, by Père Gratry, p. 239.

‡ First Cor., XIII., 13.

merely to attribute to one of these virtues a higher rank than to the other two, he also desired to make it clear that, in the end, it is love that is the source and principle of everything, that it contains everything in its immensity, that it is truly everything itself and that the other virtues are only different manifestations of its omnipotent and universal action. But I do not know how to express to what a degree the good thief's prayer, humble and naive, so eloquent in its simplicity, so forceful in its brevity, seems to me to have the mark of true love, and how sweet it must have been to the heart of Jesus. To say to a friend whom we love, and by whom we are loved: "Remember me," is not this to ask everything and to say everything?

In our trials, constantly renewed here below, in all our sufferings, but above all in our last hour, let us not endeavour to address to God long, complicated prayers. Has not Christ at different times shown us in the Gospel the desire He has for the sanguine prayers of a soul which knows how to say everything in a word, because it loves, and love needs only a word? * Remember me! This suffices for all my needs. Remember my sins to blot them out, my weakness to take my hand, my sufferings to lighten them, my miseries to sympa-

* Matt., vi., 7.

thize with them, and my temptations to aid me to overcome them. Remember me, O Thou who, by Thy sole presence, drivest away the gloomy fears of agony, and the instinctive terrors of death.

Christians, we shall never sufficiently thank our brother in Christ's love for having taken up the defence of the just one sacrificed in the cause of justice, and for having addressed to Him in the name of all humanity, this blessed supplication which produced from the Saviour so marvellous a response. "The good thief," says St. John Chrysostom, "had not to ask long for his admission into Paradise, but as soon as he pronounced one word all the sins of his life were pardoned, and he received, even before the apostles, the reward promised to those who have fought valiantly." And, indeed, without hesitation, without delay, without condition, Jesus made to the humble penitent this ravishing promise: "Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in Paradise." Meditating upon this, we shall understand the exclamation of a commentator on the Sacred Scriptures: "How is it that he did not die of joy at receiving such a promise, confirmed by an oath?" If he did not die of joy, at least at this un hoped for affirmation, this unheard-of assurance, which the greatest of saints never obtained, he must have entered into an absolutely new

state of soul, and into the exaltation of an inexpressible gratitude.

When Mary Magdalen was at the feet of the Saviour, in the house of Simon the Pharisee, I believe that she wept tears of repentance, but, above all, that she wept tears of joy. The Saviour did not drive her away scornfully! The Saint of Saints received the homage of her heart, despite its blemishes! Then, at last, assured of pardon, the sinner rose up, rehabilitated by her love and transfigured by her tears.

But here the prodigy is still more striking and the action more rapid; for death is approaching, and in the solemnity of the last struggle, the human soul escapes all mediocrity.

In one word, the good thief asked everything; in one word, Jesus wishes to promise everything! Yes! everything that is in my power, not alone pardon, nor the promise of Heaven, but Heaven to-day and Heaven with me. If the Master Himself had not spoken thus, how many of His disciples in all times would have considered this reward too sudden, this favor excessive. But Christ anticipated their jealous sensitiveness and their selfish scruples. To the self-seeking spirits who would be scandalized to see this criminal, his hands empty of good works, ascend in one bound from his infamous gibbet to the enjoyment of eternal

happiness, He replies in the Gospel: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will? Is thy eye evil because I am good?"* As to ourselves, sinners and criminals also, let us, each in his own way, admire unceasingly the marvels of mercy which Christ the Saviour renews as often as a soul truly humble and repentant accepts suffering and death upon the cross with resignation. Jesus while living did not say: "I have pity on one man," but "I have pity on the multitude." He did not say: "I have come to save certain privileged ones," but "to save all those who believe in me." St. Paul represents Christ risen and sitting at the right hand of His Father "living always to make intercession for us," † and the dwellers in Heaven hear with ravishment these ineffable supplications. But at the same time, He is always dying for us upon our altars in a mysterious manner, in order to repeat to the inhabitants of the earth the merciful words He pronounced from the cross. Yes, in truth, when a human being in the depth of his distress, says to the Saviour: "Remember me!" the same request obtains infallibly the same response.

By a special design of the infinite goodness, the two words are united, and, so to speak, mingled

* Matt., xx., 15.

† Hebrews, vii, 25.

into an eternal harmony, and nothing henceforth will be able to separate them. It is a celestial dialogue of which the meaning will never be understood unless God replies to man.

Christians, let us not wait until the hour of our death, to understand that neither prosperity nor misfortune are worthy of such sollicitude on our part, but let us also aspire to the possession of the eternal Kingdom. In our desolations, let us recall that it is to a crucified thief that Jesus has made the most marvellous promise that ever human ear has heard; let us not always try to avoid suffering; let us not try to take the nails out of our hands and feet, since it is from the cross that one speaks intimately with Jesus and discovers Heaven.

Ah! if this is so, my Saviour, I accept all and I consent to all. Grant only that I may see thee, hear thee, and never leave thee. If I must languish in endless sickness, if I must lose those whom I love, and pass my sad life in tears; if at my last hour I find myself alone and deprived of all succor I shall be satisfied to know that thou art there.

When the darkness gathers above me as above the cross of Christ, I shall see Heaven on the other side of Death. And when neither speaking nor hearing anything more, I shall seem to the eyes of the spectators of my agony to enter into

the eternal silence, I shall still murmur interiorly :
“Remember me, O Lord !” and He will answer
me : “This very day, thou shalt be with me in
Paradise.”

THIRD MEDITATION.

THE SUBLIME ACCORD OF CHRISTIAN
SOULS IN ACCEPTING SACRIFICE
AND SEPARATION.—MARY GIVEN
BY JESUS TO ALL MEN AS
THEIR MOTHER.

I.

Woman, behold thy son ;

Son, behold thy mother.

John, XIX., 26 27.

During the three long hours of Jesus' torment, Mary remained motionless and, as it were, crucified with her son, and still the Gospel mentions only this single speech addressed by Jesus to His mother: "Woman, behold thy son," and it does not say that the Blessed Virgin answered this unique and short word of farewell.* It is however certain that they loved each other beyond anything we can conceive, and that in the terrible moments that preceded the last separation their mutual love grew immeasurably. "The hearts of the son and

* As to the word *woman*, in Hebrew as in Greek, it is a respectful form of address and excludes in no way the most filial tenderness.

of the mother," says St. Francis de Sales, "regarded each other not only with an unparalleled sympathy, but also with an admirable generosity and constancy, because they did not complain, nor did they divert their eyes from each other to make their sorrow less sensible, but they gazed upon each other fixedly.*

How can we explain on the part of the Saviour this apparent coldness, and on the part of Mary this attitude so different from that which mothers are ordinarily placed in when they see their beloved sons about to die? If I am not mistaken, this is the explanation. Since the day when, for the first time, the lips of the infant Jesus opened to pronounce the name of His mother, until the commencement of His public life, they had conversed every day, every hour, every moment. Their thoughts were constantly united, and their hearts never ceased to beat for the same designs, the same enterprises, the same immolation. Now, if they do not speak any more it is because they have said in advance all that the earth has ever heard of conversation which is at once most tender, most sublime, most heroic and most divine. In their souls, truly united and mingled together, still resound the vibrations of their former words. Have you not read in the Gospel that Mary kept

* *Deuxième Sermon pour le Vendredi Saint.*

always alive in her heart, and revived again and again by meditation the marvellous words which the shepherds came to address to her in Bethlehem, about the apparition of an angel in the middle of the night, and the singing of the celestial host? *

And, besides, whoever has known in this life the perfect unity of love, is aware that there are moments when silence surpasses the eloquence of all protestations and the sweetness of all addresses, and when souls are more deeply united by renouncing every exterior means of communication.

One of those men who loved their mother with a most passionate tenderness, and who received from their mother incomparable proofs of love, St. Augustin, has preserved for us in his *Confessions* the souvenir of an ever celebrated conversation, which the brush of a great contemporary artist has caused to live again before our eyes. †

“ We were discoursing,” says the blessed son of this blessed mother, “ very sweetly... enquiring between ourselves... of what sort the eternal life of the saints was to be... Raising up ourselves with a glowing affection towards this eternal felicity, we did by degrees pass through all things bodily... We were soaring higher yet. We came

* St. Luke, II., 19.

† *Confessions*, book IX., chap. 10.

to our own minds, and went beyond them, that we might arrive at that region of never-failing plenty, where Thou feedest Israel for ever with the food of Truth, and where life is eternal... And while we were discoursing and panting after her, we slightly touched on her with the whole effort of our heart..." A few days after this heavenly conversation, St. Monica was seized with a burning fever, and a week later she entered in the possession of that eternal happiness which they had both so ardently desired.

But did not the Son of God, who is going to die to save mankind, and she who accepts all sufferings in order to cooperate with the work of her son, have in their daily conversations higher views, more profound ecstasies, more divine ravishments than those of Monica and Augustin? Had they not also become in advance inhabitants of Heaven? There was a time for speech, but now it is time for silence. Both retire into a perfect recollection so as not to lose a single drop of the bitter chalice, and to be entirely free for the distress, desolation and total crushing of the expiation.

When two souls which are completely united in the heroism of sacrifice, as theirs were in that of love, have taken together a supreme resolution, one would consider them unfeeling so well do they know how to hide their interior torments and

so great is their courage as to appear impassibility.

Is it not in this manner, poor mothers and wives, that you shall give, when it is necessary, the son who is blood of your blood, the spouse who is soul of your soul?

Yes, when it will be question of confronting death and opposing his breast to the enemy menacing our frontiers, your heart will be broken but you will not draw back, nay! you will not hesitate an instant before the sacrifice. What crushing grief when the child of your love, when the friend of your choice will go forth to danger and perhaps to death! And however you will say: Hasten, O my well beloved. There is not a moment to lose, for, to destroy us, the enemy has resolved to take us by surprise. And why will you speak thus? Why will you know how to stifle your sobs and check your tears? Because your love will be cold? Because in your mother-heart the fibres will be broken? Because in your wifely soul there will be no longer a single tremor at the thought of the sufferings that await him?

No, but because your dear and noble souls vibrate together in the sublime accord which is called patriotism, and because they have accepted everything, even the inconsolable grief of never seeing them again here below.

Apparently more happy than the Mother of Jesus, His foster-father, St. Joseph, had left this earth when everything was still peaceful in the humble dwelling at Nazareth. He departed first according to the order of nature and the privilege of age. Probably the only one among the innumerable multitude of men, he had the happiness of dying in the arms of the Saviour, gazing upon Her whom His perfect purity had made worthy of loving.

The plan of Providence was a little more severe for Her, who, to so many glorious titles, should add those of Queen of Martyrs and Mother of Sorrows; and you know by what a grand hymn and by what a touching melody, which we may say is bedewed with tears, Christian humanity has immortalized the recollection of the Holy Virgin prostrate at the foot of her son's cross:

*For His people's sins rejected
She, her Jesus unprotected,
Saw with thorns, with scourges rent;
Saw her son from judgment taken,
Her beloved in death forsaken
Till His spirit forth He sent.
Who could mark, from tears refraining
Christ's dear Mother uncomplaining
In so great a sorrow bowed? **

* This translation is taken from *Hymns for the Year*, and is attributed by some to Bishop R. MANT.—*Note of Translator.*

Now, it is the unspeakable grief of the mother seeing her son dying before her eyes that reveals to me in all its depths this word of farewell, too clear a prelude of separation. "Woman, behold thy son." Was not the substituting of John in His place, on the part of Jesus, to recall solemnly to Mary the irreparable loss she was about to undergo, and, so to speak, in advance to tear himself away from her love.

As they were voluntary victims for the salvation of mankind, the Son of God and she whom St. Francis de Sales so well called "the most loving, most loved, most lovable mother that ever was", should control themselves just as we under this terrible law: "One shall be taken, the other left."* Yes, of these very two who are the most completely united and whose souls desire to be inseparable. Who will ever be able to understand, much less to express, the heartbreak which the Blessed Virgin must have felt when, to obey her son, she turned her tearful eyes from the bloody wounds and the august face of Jesus and looked upon St. John, who from this solemn moment received the right to say "my mother" to her who had brought forth his God!

Ah! indeed, the Holy Virgin had not waited for this hour to accord her care, her very tender-

* St. Luke. xvii., 34.

ness, to the disciple whom Jesus loved, and who, alone among the apostles, had the courage to accompany and assist Him on Calvary. What mother does not set aside in her heart a place sacred to the friends of her son? But alas what was he but a man, though the purest and most lovable of all, to replace the marvellous and sovereignly adorable being whose face was the very splendor of the infinite, whose every word, every gesture, every movement, was as a ray of the Divinity?

And, when the Beloved one goes away, when life flows from his heart and his soul seems about to die, is it possible to find even the shadow of a compensation for the loss of such a treasure?

“But,” admirably says St. Francis de Sales, “as she knows that it was the will of the Eternal Father that His Son should die and that she should be a witness of His death, this was sufficient to make her firmly stand at the foot of the cross, approving His death, as it were, and agreeing to it. This was her glory, this her triumph, and, consequently, she desired to die and did finally die from it, so that her son’s death was the cause of her death, although she did not die immediately.” *

Yes, such are indeed the traits, opposite though in perfect harmony, that characterize the sorrowful

* *Sermon on the Feast of the Assumption.*

but sublime state of a soul which I have called the accord of Christian souls in the acceptance of sacrifice and separation.

Here, Christians, is the example which we must imitate when we also, standing heart-broken at the foot of a cross where we would a thousand times prefer to be nailed ourselves, see in slow agony and torturing death, the beings whom we love. When nature has uttered the instinctive and sacred cry of grief, the involuntary revolt of the first moments is appeased little by little into prayer; and behold the sublime hymn that Christian faith and hope, standing higher than all crosses and tombs, chant through their tears.

Harken to these words of supernatural sweetness and celestial suavity, and, when it will be necessary, ask of God to make them spring despite yourself from your mouth, but now murmuring, as well as from your indignant heart:

“Diest thou, O our well-beloved! Diest thou for our salvation and for thine, to obey God, to accomplish the eternal movement of life, to deliver thy soul from the nets of false nature to return to the bosom of God.

“Diest thou, O our well-beloved! We shall follow thee soon. We shall not see thy face for a time, but thy heart shall live in ours, and we shall feel it there sometimes palpitating, as we felt

it here below. Let us be united in death, as we have been in life. May thy soul, in its flight, carry a ray of our soul, and the premices of our spirit towards eternal repose. May a tie bind us to thee, departed soul, and may this tie dispose us to die. May a bond attach thee to us, who are in the world, and may this bond mysteriously keep something of thy being in the land of the living.

“Sleepest thou, O our well-beloved! as the seed sleeps within the shell of a withered plant? One day, thou shalt blossom again under the sun of a new Spring.”*

Yes, indeed, for all of us, Christians, as for the poor Mother of the Saviour, this is the fruit that can accrue from cruel heartbreakings and mortal wounds.

The first soul that has flown to Heaven becomes for that which is still upon the earth a focus of celestial attraction.

Under the blow of separation which is insupportable to it, there springs in the abandoned soul a sudden, unheard of, almost sovereign detachment from the interests, ambitions and happiness of this life. Incessantly solicited and as it were raised on high by a continuous and irresistible influence, this soul progresses rapidly and arises to elevations which it would never attain without

* P. Gratry, *Méditations inédites*, p. 188.

this bloody martyrdom. And what shall I say when our griefs are so multiplied about us that our relations seem to be more numerous and more intimate with the dead than the living? It is then indeed that the word of Christ is realized: "Where your treasure is, there is your heart also." *

To soften our instinctive apprehensions before the mystery of the future life, nothing will have more efficacy than the desire and the anticipated joy of finding again those whom we love.

"Those who die," says Fénelon, "are in regard to us merely absent for a few years, or perhaps a few months. Their apparent loss should serve to weary us of a place where everything is subject to loss and to make us love the place where everything is restored. . . . Let us unite ourselves in heart to him whom we regret. He sees us, he loves us, he is touched by our needs, he prays for us. So far from having lost him, you will find him more present, more united to you, more helpful for your consolation, more efficacious in counsels of perfection, if you really desire to transform into a union known only to the eyes of faith, the visible fellowship of your lives here below." †

Père Gratry, whose name I take pleasure in writing near to that of Fénelon, has words no less

* Matt., vi, 21.

† *Lettres spirituelles*. Lettres 199 and 201.

beautiful : "Happy," says he, "are the souls nourished on the invisible as on the visible, which preserve the memory and the love of those who are no longer here, or, at least, who do not live before our eyes. Let us make ourselves worthy of perceiving them more in our hearts." *

The general work of man's salvation was accomplished because Jesus Christ and His mother accepted, through love of us, the momentary separation which prepares for eternal reunion. It is thus that the particular work of our own salvation ought to be accomplished. Let us consent generously, as Mary did, to the departure of the cherished ones who precede us to immortality. Let us render ourselves worthy of meeting them there by accepting after her own example the duties which God imposes on us and the holy mission which He entrusts us in regard to those whom we ought still to love here below.

II.

The eternal Word in coming to dwell among men in flesh like theirs, has deified and carried to the infinite all the most noble sentiments of the human heart. Or rather, He has revealed to us that the laws of love are the same in Heaven as on earth, and that the family relations do not

* Henry Perreyve, chap. vii., p. 250.

characterize in a less perfect manner the inner life of God and His union with humanity than the union of men among themselves. It is to Jesus Christ, and to Him alone, that we owe the blessed privilege of saying with tender and confident familiarity to the Eternal, the Infinite, the Incomprehensible "Our Father, who art in Heaven." He is a Father, so I tremble no more in comparing my smallness to His immensity, my weakness to His omnipotence, my profound moral misery to His sovereign perfection. A father ought to look upon his son with complacence, or at least with compassion. What matters it then to a son that he is needy when his father is infinitely rich? Does he not know that being the son, he is the heir, and that his all-kind father will not disinherit him? And how could Jesus better make us understand the inconceivable tenderness of the divine paternity than by calling our goodness wicked in comparison with the goodness of God? "If you being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children: how much more will your Father who is in Heaven give good things to them that ask him?" *

Nevertheless, in the order of divine paternity, as in the attributes of human fatherhood, it is certain that the outpourings of love do not exclude the

* Matt., VII., 11.

duty of justice. Whether he rules all the universe or conducts the most humble family, the father is chief and in his hands all authority rests. He is obliged to make laws, to give orders and to insure their execution. It will be his happiness to reward, but oftentimes it will be his duty to punish.

The mother, on the contrary, provided the father is there, is not charged with the duty of rendering strict justice. Her mission is to intercede and not to punish. She fills the rôle of an advocate, not of a judge. This is why Christ, after having revealed to us in God the tenderness of the best of fathers, has bequeathed to us the heart and the tenderness of His mother, before dying on the cross. This is a prodigy of love of which our Protestant brethren have not known how to understand the importance, taste the sweetness, and admire the infinite delicacy and sovereign beauty.

However, who is the man who has not experienced, were it only during the too short years of his youth, that which is immense and inexhaustible in the love of a mother for her child? And, on the other hand, what child did not believe that there was in his mother ideal beauty and absolute perfection? My mother said it, so it is true; she wishes it, so it is good; she has pardoned me, so I am faultless; she loves me, so I am happy. What child does not consider his mother

powerful enough to preserve him from all dangers, and, with his little hand in hers, does not walk untrémblingly in the middle of the darkest night, with as much confidence as though he were led by an angel of God?

Suddenly the sun has trembled, the walls of houses have been cast down, whole edifices have disappeared in deep crevasses. Struck with fear the dwellers hasten to the depths of their houses. A woman appears, trembling and distraught, in the middle of the ruins. In her arms she holds a little child. Look at him closely, he is not afraid, for he is with his mother; and presently when she will have fled far enough, and will stop worn out by fatigue, he, without taking any notice of this scene of death, will tranquilly sleep upon her bosom.

When St. John heard the sweet voice of the crucified Redeemer saying to him, while designating Mary: "Behold thy mother," I believe that they recalled the day when the Saviour said to the Apostles: "Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven."* These two words of Christ to His mother and to St. John complete and consummate the part which Mary, following the divine plan, should take in the work of redemption. In the same proportion as her son seems to depart from her, the Holy Virgin

* St. Matt., XVIII., 3.

comes closer to us and becomes more really our mother. In fact when Jesus speaks so, it is not merely a duty which He imposes on Mary and a dignity which He confers on John. In the two hearts it produces immediately the effect that His word indicates. Henceforth between the Holy Virgin and Christian humanity, represented here by St. John, a bond is established, a bond most sweet, most close, most indissoluble. Mary will love us really as a mother and we shall truly love her as children.

And, if any one reproach us for our tender and confident devotion to the Blessed Virgin, let us not weary our souls with useless controversies. We will place in evidence the Gospel itself and the last wishes of the dying Saviour.

Catholics, let us be proud of our devotion to Mary; let us imitate more than ever the conduct of St. John in regard to the mother whom Jesus has just given him. "From that hour the disciple took her to his own." * Wherever there is a crucifix we have the happiness of seeing the image of Her whom St. John never left thenceforth. She stood at the foot of the cross and she deserved to remain there always, and I shall willingly say with Christ himself to Protestants: "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." †

* John, xix., 27.

† St. Matthew, xix., 6.

But how many, even among Catholics, seem to believe that devotion to the Blessed Virgin is good only for women and little children! Whence have you come, O proud men? Was it not a mother who carried you in her arms and nursed you in your infancy? Do you blush, when fifty, at still loving her who has done so much and suffered so much for you? Ah! I see the true and particular devotion of women represented in this very moment at the foot of the cross. While only one man is there, three women, all called Mary, assist by their compassion and comfort by their presence the dying Son of God. A virgin, a married woman, a converted sinner, that is to say, woman in all the conditions she can be in here below.* Is it not the living symbol and, so to speak, the prophecy in action of the rôle of woman in Christianity. Standing at the foot of the cross, that is to say, sure and immovable in her faith, her love, her merciful and courageous assistance of Jesus Christ, too often abandoned by men.

Standing at the foot of the cross, that is in the midst of all the infirmities, all the miseries, all the human sufferings with which Jesus has deigned to identify Himself, and realizing during eighteen

* "There stood by the cross of Jesus, His mother and His mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalen."—John., xix., 25.

"And there were many women afar off who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto Him."—Matt., xxvii., 55.

centuries with wonderful eclat this touching expression of the Old Testament: "Where there is no wife he mourneth that is in want."* In giving us Mary, does not the Saviour seem to wish to complete this prophetic oracle and to say to this timid and feeble crowd that we are: Where there is no mother, the infant suffers and weeps?

It is certain, and this certainty is unspeakably dear to all Christians, that the Blessed Virgin, obeying the merciful desires of her son, has consented to divide with all men the limitless love that she had for Jesus Christ. In our desolation, in our distress of every kind, when we prostrate ourselves at the feet of the crucified God, we will not arise before having heard the Saviour say to us once again: "Behold thy mother!" You see her there standing at the foot of your cross as she stood at the foot of mine, you see her there present at thy bed of agony and tenderly turned towards thee at thy last hour.

To appease thy sorrow and drive far off from thee these sombre phantoms, she will murmur in thy ear the consoling words that all mothers know and she will repeat to thee that which she learned on Calvary to repeat to all her children: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." "This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise."

* Eccles., xxxvi., 27.

FOURTH MEDITATION.

THE DEPTH OF THE ABYSS.

“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”—Matt., xxvii., 46.

The evangelist St. Matthew tells us that Jesus uttered this cry of great distress towards the ninth hour, that is to say, a few moments before He died. On the contrary, the first three words had been pronounced in the beginning of His crucifixion. During the greater part of His torture, the Saviour preserved the solemn silence that was a preparation for the infinite eloquence with which He will speak to us eternally.

This silence of Christ is as adorable as His words, and Bossuet does not hesitate to say that it is this that touches him the most in the Passion.* The hour will come when we, too, shall have to imitate this solemn silence. More than once I have seen the humblest Christian, the weakest woman, the very infant child, learning this sublime science and practicing the heroic virtue of suffer-

* *Sermon on Silence.*

ing without complaining when they remembered the silence of Jesus.

And, in our last illness, when we shall realize that there is no hope of cure, when suffering has weakened us, there will be moments when, like Jesus on the cross, we shall feel the need of speaking no more. It is not solely on account of the loss of strength, and because his life is gradually ebbing from him, that the dying man becomes silent; it is also because his soul retires into the depths of itself and reserves all its thoughts, all its energies and all its faculties for the last decisive combat.

This divine wish, this desire to be alone with God, is felt by the greater part of Christians after the example of Jesus, their model and master, and, in their silent hours, "they meditate upon the other side of death, the luminous, immortal side, which succeeds to dolor and darkness." * And, in fact, as there were on Calvary thick vapors and mysterious shadows which seemed to wish to hide from the earth the unheard-of spectacle of God's death, and which threw everything into consternation, there will be also around our agonies the efforts and, sometimes, the terrible assaults of the invisible enemy whom Jesus Himself called "the power of darkness." † By a predestination that

* *Henry Perreye*, by *Père Gratry*, chap. vii., p. 224.

† *Luke*, xxii., 53.

marks the glorious conformity of our life with that of the Son of God on earth, nearly all the phenomena that took place on Golgotha are renewed, in a certain way, at the death of each of us. The sun disappears from our eyes and the shadow envelops us in an impenetrable shroud. In the internal writhings and the last convulsive movements of our whole physical being when it is ready to be dissolved, it seems that the earth trembles and that the rocks are rent, and when the soul driven, or rather led forth by God, from the body it animated, is breathed forth in a last sigh, it is as though the veil of the temple were rent and new horizons opened up. The terrifying convulsions of nature and the miraculous darkness that obscured the heavens at the brightest hour of the day, seem to me the exact representation of the inconceivable state of the soul, the terrible interior crisis which the Saviour wishes to experience, and of which we are going to try to understand the depth and the intensity.*

* These wonders startled the pagans themselves. Tertullian, who lived in the second century, calls to witness their public archives: *Eum mundi casum relatum in arcanis vestris habetis.* (*Apol.*, c. 21.)

It is certain that in the time of Origen and Julius Africanus, the fact of the darkness was considered incontestable. (See Julius Africanus, Migne, *Greek Patrology*, xx., p. 99.)

The expression employed by the Evangelists can mean *over all the country* as well as *over all the world*.

Of all human sufferings, none is more poignant than complete and universal abandonment.

The whole world can abandon me, if a single soul remains with me, I will not trouble myself about the indifference of the world. Indeed! If I am forgotten in some lonely ravine, on the evening of a bloody battle, I shall call upon the enemy himself who passes near me. If my groans come to his ears he will take pity on my misery and offer me his hand. But if I am entirely alone, if no one can hear my voice, I shall obtain no succor, no remedy, no consolation. This is what Christ wished to suffer; this is the extremity through which He wished to pass, and it is this that drew from Him the mysterious cry of distress: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

A poor ship-wrecked sailor, cast by the tempest on a desolate rock, from which each wave tries to detach his frozen and bruised fingers, calls with all his might to a ship which passes; but it sails away without hearing him, and soon disappears below the horizon. Cast thus all bleeding upon the cruel rock of Calvary, Jesus saw Himself forsaken by men, and now He feels that He is abandoned by God. It is true that the Blessed Virgin, St. John and St. Mary Magdalen remained faithful at the foot of Jesus' cross, but they were powerless to aid

Him, and was not the sight of their desolation an increase of sorrow for Him?

But how can we say that Christ, who was God, could have said that He was abandoned by God? The genius of Bossuet endeavored to solve this unanswerable enigma. "It was necessary for this that the divinity of Jesus Christ should have, as it were, retired within itself, or, that making its presence felt only in a certain part of the soul, it should have abandoned all the rest to the strokes of the divine vengeance; or, that by some other secret unknown to men, it had found the means of harmonizing the very close union of God and man with this extreme desolation into which the man Jesus Christ had been plunged under the redoubled and multiplied strokes of the divine wrath. In what way all this was done, let us not ask of men." *

But if we cannot understand how this mystery was performed, we are permitted, at least, to seek its motives, which are all merciful ones. Yes, in

* *First Sermon on the Passion of Christ.* "In so general a depression", says Bourdaloue, every resource failed Him, even on the part of His Father. He is deprived of every support, which is to say that His humanity is deserted by His Divinity, and that left to itself, it falls into the most profound mortal desolation." And, in his first sermon on the Passion, Bourdaloue adds: "This desertion and this abandonment by God is in some way the pain of loss which it was necessary for Jesus to experience for all of us, as St. Paul says."

truth, when one understands thoroughly this word of the Saviour, though at first sight it is inexplicable, he finds in it the most marvellous manifestation of the sovereign goodness. To sum up in one word, Jesus wished to descend with us to the depth of the lowest abyss, in order to aid us to arise therefrom.

In a few moments He is going to die; now He casts a last glance on the work of Redemption He has undertaken, and He asks Himself if anything is lacking to His sacrifice. It is then indeed that He ought to repeat the touching words by which St. John begins the thirteenth chapter of his Gospel :

“ Jesus knowing that His hour was come that He should pass out of this world to the Father : having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end.” *

Unto the end, that is, not only to the last moment of His life, but to the farthest limit where love can go.

After the numberless sufferings which He has undergone, there remains one which the Saviour was still ignorant of, and He wished to partake of its torment with the poor human heart. “ For we have not a high priest who cannot have compassion on our infirmities, but one tempted in all

* John, XIII., I.

things such as we are, without sin."* This is why, at this moment, He deigns to take up Himself the burden of all human despairs.

Our dear Lord, it was not fitting that on the day of the last judgment a single man could say: "I have suffered more than you."

A short while ago, we compassionated the anguish of a wounded soldier abandoned during the night on a battle-field, and the despair of a ship-wrecked sailor, when the ship sails away without having heard his cry of distress. And, nevertheless, does not one consolation remain, and is it not in such extremities that mankind turns its face to Heaven, and that in the universal abandonment of men and things the soul ascends higher than earth and takes refuge in God? But what would happen, if, in the same degree that the earth fails us, Heaven repels us, and if God, when we seek Him, departs from us?

It is this frightful sight of which Jesus wished to sound the immensity, and feel the horror. "All the other torments of the Saviour," says Bossuet, "were only a vision and a painting in comparison with the dolors, the oppression and the anguish which the divine soul of Jesus suffers under the smiting hand of God. His Father, who, during the course of His life, was pleased to give

* Heb., iv., 15.

so many marks of the love He had for Him, leaves Him now without any assistance." *

Souls that believe themselves abandoned by God suffer two veritable tortures: darkness of the spirit and despair of the heart.

The man Jesus, who could not cease to enjoy the vision of God, because of the hypostatic union, could not know, even for an instant, the least failing in intelligence or in will. But by a prodigy of condescension and of mercy, and in order to make Himself in all things like to us, excepting sin, as St. Paul expresses it, He wished to undergo, even to be crushed by, the suffering and martyrdom which, in our case, are the consequences of real doubt and despair.

Jesus asks of God: "*Why?*" What mysterious darkness seems to have invaded His spirit? It is impossible for us to conceive it, and it is necessary to repeat with Bossuet: "Let us not ask of men in what way it was done."

Who will tell the terrible anguish of a troubled imagination, the involuntary revolts of reason, the sorrowful anxieties of doubt? Who will describe the cruel alternatives of an intelligence that believes it touches the light and, little by little, is falling into darkness? Who will write of the absolute bereavement and the nameless distress of a

* *First Sermon on the Passion.*

mind that does not know if there is a God in Heaven, and if in the hearts of men there is anything else than selfishness, pride, jealousy and scorn? Yesterday, I believed in the soul, in immortality and a future life; to-day, I ask myself if these words, which we repeat through habit, cover chimeras or express realities.

Oh! how sad is the night when my ideas are confused, when so many contradictions weary my brain and trouble my reason! My God, why hast thou created me—me, who never asked to be born? If it is thou who hast given me intelligence, why dost thou refuse it the evidence of truth?

Oh! how terrible the grief of incessantly asking "*why*" and of never receiving an answer! At least, when the child repeats this word, which comes constantly to its lips, it says it with a certain sweetness, because the kind answers of the father or mother give it the joy of a discovery and the surprise of a novelty. But I, who am no longer a child, and have no one in whom I confide, revolve again and again in my mind these unanswerable problems, and when I am exhausted by reading, studying and comparing, I see no more clearly than before, and in my waking moments, or in the sleep that wearies me, I am pursued by this eternal *why*.

My God, why are there so many useless and unmerited sufferings upon the earth? Why do some die of hunger while others have all the joys of riches and all the splendors of luxury? Why are some born blind, others deaf-mutes, others lepers, others paralytics? Why are innocent beings tortured their whole life through by hideous sores? Why are there mothers who kill their infants and sons who murder their fathers? Why was this furor of voluptuousness inflamed in our veins, which arouses our blood and tortures us even more than it elates us, and which, under the deceptive name of love, multiplies crimes among men?

To withdraw from such tortures, I try to flee from myself. I leave the house and enter into a church. Kneeling among the faithful, I endeavour to unite myself to their prayer, to believe, to love and to adore with them. But my spirit escapes me, despite myself, and carries me far off from the temple where I sought refuge, and from the altar where I hoped to recognize and feel the presence of God.

The book that I read to-day comes back, importunate, pitiless, hateful, but powerful and dominating, to murmur in my ear the objections, the terrible *whys* that keep back the prayers upon my lips and arrest my adoration. Meanwhile, I open the Bible that I have brought with me, and,

by a divine permission, my eyes fall upon a page of the Passion. I love this account of a crushing grief, and when I come to this agonizing cry: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" it seems to me that my revolts are appeased, and, seeing Christ partake of my suffering, I become more calm before His cross around which falls a profound night

If the light is hidden from the eyes of Him who said: "I am the light of the world," and if He asks "Why," without obtaining any answer, why will not a man, lowly as I am, have his hours of darkness and his days of obscurity?

Let us, then, make use of our reason, and let us try to have a little philosophy, and our personal trials will not cast us into this consternation, and the misfortunes of men will not make us doubt the goodness of God. We wish to be able to know the *why* of all things: it is a desire inherent in the very nature of our soul eager for truth, it is a need of our hearts which injustice revolts and suffering scandalizes.

But if the explanation of the details escapes us, have we not the general principle of all explanations? Do not reason and faith tell us that God is sovereignly wise and infinitely good? If all mysteries were unveiled, what merit would we have for believing, and would we not lose the happiness

promised by Christ to those who believe without having seen? It is not at the time of trial, but on the day of reward that to our ravished gaze should appear the harmony of the divine plan, the providential reason for our griefs, the evidence, the splendor, the proof of the infinite goodness.

But whatever may be the sufferings of the mind, the human heart has its desolations still more cruel. I will not try to enumerate them here, nor even to give an idea of them. Where is the man who, on certain days of his life, and perhaps very frequently, has not uttered the touching plaint of the priest at the foot of the altar: "Why art thou sad, my soul, and why dost thou afflict me?"

In the excess of affliction I call for succor and no one answers me. There is no one in Heaven to hear me, and no one on earth to come to my aid. Despite my supplications, grief, physical or moral, continues in me its pitiless work. Things and events go on as usual, and the inexorable laws of nature crush me without hearing my cries or considering my tears. God neither appears nor intervenes when His creature calls upon Him in distress. Is He deaf, or pitiless? If He hears me, why does He not deliver me; and if He does not hear me, why do they say He exists?

Everything goes contrary to my desires and my hopes. I wished to do good and I do evil. I try to

grasp happiness and it escapes me. Death has snatched from me the being whom I loved. He was the child of my predilection; yesterday, he enlivened everything with his joyous cries, only last night, I looked at him tenderly when he slept in his crib. To-day, his closed eyes see me not, no breath comes from his pale lips, and to-morrow we shall have to cast this masterpiece of beauty, this marvel of grace, as a vile thing, into the depths of the tomb. Who is the priest who has not heard upon the lips of unfortunate people of all classes this awful saying: "Do you not see very well that Providence has abandoned me?"

I founded my life and built my future upon a love approved by God, and, little by little, without reason and contrary to all reason, without justice and contrary to all justice, the edifice of my happiness has been cast down! My joy has left me, the sun has disappeared from my horizon, my soul has lost its soul, and I remain alone in a sunless world, in an atmosphere where I no longer breathe.

It is an abridgement of all these despairs that Jesus has concentrated in this instant, the duration of which is unknown to us, but which sufficed to make Him understand the unspeakable grief of supreme abandonment. He wished to sympathize with the sufferings of the poor human creature who no longer sees anything or knows

anything, who counts upon no one, and expects neither remedy, nor solace, nor consolation.

Christ wished to experience even the indescribable anguish that seizes a man when, hunted so to speak, by all around him, he retires within himself in sullen sadness and insurmountable and universal disgust. Sometimes, indeed, to this sadness and disgust we see succeed a sort of blind rage, and then the human being, who is beside to himself with grief, turns against God, and, in his folly, tries to solace himself by blaspheming Him.

Jesus knew that a large number of unfortunate people could not restrain upon their lips the cry of despair; He tries to excuse them by complaining with them.

O beloved Saviour, thy voice will ascend higher than that of the despairing; unto the end of time it will cover the sorrowful accents of murmuring and the imprecations which excessive grief wrests too often from our weakness, and it will be like the buckler of human blasphemers.

To become the friend of the despairing and to be able to attract them to thee and save them, thou hast wished to resemble them and become their equal in misery; to withdraw them from the abyss, thou hast the courage to descend thither with them.

Ah! It seems to me that I see those who have

unconsciously or culpably fallen into despair, as though they had fallen into the jaws of a terrible machine, hesitate a few moments and then descend little by little into the depths whence no one returns.

Who has not noticed in certain rivers whirlpools that seem like living monsters, always in quest of prey, and always ready to devour a victim? The unfortunate who allows himself to yield to their attraction, commences by turning about slowly, then the circles become smaller, the movement becomes more and more rapid, and finally, at the last ring of the pitiless spiral, the gulf closes and the man disappears. How many souls do we see, alas! though powerless to retain them, whom despair thus enchains, and who perish miserably before our eyes.

· This is why the frightful statistics of suicide are always on the increase. And whence comes this continuous augmentation of the most irreparable of all disasters? It comes from minds that have broken with the Christian faith and are sunk in materialism; from hearts in which the love of Christ has perished; from lives that have been wasted in debauchery. It is alcohol that inflames the brain of the unfortunate who seeks to forget his misfortunes, and arms his hand for the crime. It is the lust for gold that causes him to lose sight

of the eternal hopes, and that troubles his reason when confronted with some great reverse of fortune. This is why each year sees augmented the number of unfortunates who no longer know anything about the other world, who do not believe in immortality, who go along aimlessly, and who, by a strange disgust for all life, hope, by quitting the earth, to hide themselves forever in the obscurity of nothingness.

Let us look with profound compassion upon these unfortunates, but, above all, let us try to make those who would be tempted to imitate them understand how one rises from the gulf to mount to the surface where he sees clearly and breathes freely.

It is very important not to forget that the cruel feeling of abandonment which is close to despair, can enter into the soul even of believers and into the hearts of the saints who have sometimes suffered from that trial pains that cannot be imagined. How many fervent Christians have known those extremities of interior desolation, those frightful darknesses of the intelligence in which it seems that faith itself perishes, those feelings of disgust for prayer, that aversion for religious practices and, since I must dare to tell the entire truth, that ennui of God!

How many times have we not moaned, cried

out with grief and fear under the stroke of certain temptations which we felt we had no longer the strength to resist ! What terrible distractions in the imagination and, notwithstanding heroic efforts and despite the most obstinate resistance, what vacillation in the will, what inexpressible trouble in the entire being ! To shrink with horror from evil and yet to feel oneself allured to it by a terrible attraction ! How many of us ask God with sincerity, conjure Him with tears to rescue us from the fascination of pleasure, to appease the storms of passion, to remove the perilous occasion, to keep us, be it at the price of our blood, at the post that tortures, and the duty that martyrs us : We say one day to God, sincere with Him and ourselves : “ I would rather die than offend Thee,” and the following day perhaps, in a moment of culpable forgetfulness, or fatal seduction, we offend God despite all our resolutions.

And after the fall, what cutting and useless regrets, what secret humiliations, what profound dejection, what fears of divine justice, what pitiless severities against ourselves, what tardy views of the truth, what rackings of the conscience which survive all, even repentance; penitence and absolution ! It is then that the poor soul, sinful, but full of faith, perceives in all its intensity the grief of separation, and cries out with an anguish

that guilty souls alone have experienced: "My God, why have I abandoned Thee?" for it well knows that it is not God who began the rupture.

It seems that the Son of God had to be ignorant of the suffering of sin; but it is precisely this that He felt to an infinite degree, this, more than all the rest, that prompted Him to utter His great cry of distress. And, in fact, the prophet Isaias has said of the Messiah, whose Passion he describes in advance as if he had seen it with his own eyes:

"The Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all;"* and St. Paul: "Him that knew no sin, for us he hath made sin; that we might be made the justice of God in him."†

In his incomparable sermons on the Passion of Jesus Christ, in which Christian souls would find the most substantial nourishment, Bossuet says of this mysterious suffering of the Saviour: "Jesus, indeed, is innocent of the sins of men. . . . but His Father looks upon Him as a criminal. . . . Behold Him, this innocent one, this lamb without blemish, become suddenly the scapegoat, loaded with the crimes, the impieties, the blasphemies of all men. See how He embraces in truth the state of a sinner. Ah! there is my salvation. Because He speaks to God as a sinner, this gives me the

* Isaias, LIII., 6.

† II. Cor. v., 21.

liberty of speaking as a just man. . . During this open war that an avenging God waged upon His Son, the mystery of our peace was arranged, and "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." As it is to be seen sometimes in a storm, the heavens seem to burst and fall entirely upon the earth; but at the same time that it discharges itself, little by little, it begins to clear, until it puts on again its first serenity, calmed and appeased, so to speak, by its own indignation. In the same way, the divine justice, thundering upon the Son of God, with all its force, passes away little by little in the discharge; the cloud bursts and is dissipated. God begins to show to the children of Adam His face, benign and smiling, and, by an admirable contrast that embraces the whole mystery of our salvation, while He strikes without mercy His innocent Son for love of culpable men, He pardons without reserve culpable men for love of His innocent Son." *

Jesus Christ, then, felt Himself crushed under the burden of our iniquities, and, to expiate them, He desired to know the supreme suffering; that of souls that believe themselves abandoned by God. But do not think that this suffering lasted until His dying breath, for it is with filial confidence that soon He will say in expiring: "Father, into Thy hands, I commend my spirit."

* *Second Sermon on the Passion.* 3d point.

The only real and irremediable despair is when there is no longer any one to whom we might complain, nor to whom we might utter a cry of distress. A materialist or an atheist in the excess of his anguish cannot say: Matter, matter, nothingness, nothingness, why have you abandoned me? They well know that matter has no compassion and that nothingness has no bowels of mercy. But the despair that is lawful, and I almost dare to say salutary, is when, even with bitterness and in a kind of ferocious violence, the soul calls upon God, and, consequently, in a more or less unconscious manner, believes and hopes in Him.

To speak in this way to God, it is necessary not only to believe that He exists, but that He hears us. I do not fear to add: it is necessary to believe that He loves us and that He will have pity on us. I go farther still and I say that it is only love that can make these complaints; it alone is capable of this boldness and risks itself in these fits of passion. Why hast thou abandoned me when thou knowest that I wish to obey thee, that I cannot live separated from thee, that thy presence alone can console me, that is to say, when thou knowest that I love thee?

Christians, in the extremity of your desolations, when you can no longer do anything, when everything in you and around you is lost in a total

shipwreck, send boldly to Heaven the cry of the dying Saviour. I have no fear for you as long as you know how to say and repeat : My God ! Recollect that abandonment, agony, death itself with Jesus Christ are of more value than all the goods of the world without Him. Let your despair pass into the Heart of the Crucified One who is going to die for you, and He will there transform it into eternal hope. Unite your plaint to His lamentation and upon your lips, blasphemy will be changed into thanksgiving. God has left you for a moment as He had left the Son in whom He had said that He placed all His complacency. Have confidence ! sooner or later, to-day or to-morrow, the heavenly Father will say to you as He said to Jesus : “ I have abandoned you only in appearance ; I have wished that in the depths of your distress, you should utter this cry of suffering love, this irresistible appeal of a heart that loves me and cannot live without me.”

And as to thee, O Jesus ! we shall never thank thee sufficiently for having also partaken of our desolations and mingled thy anguish with ours. As an intrepid diver, thou hast not feared to follow us to the depths of the abyss, and thy powerful arm has caused us to ascend with thee to the serene regions of light and peace.

FIFTH MEDITATION.

THE THIRST FOR SOULS.

"I thirst!"—John, xix., 28.

Such is the only complaint that Jesus uttered during the whole course of His Passion. It was not, in fact, a complaint, but rather a claim for justice, when, being violently struck upon the cheek, He simply uttered these adorable words: "If I have spoken evil, give testimony of the evil; but if well, why strikest thou me?"*

The Saviour had answered with perfect moderation and becomingness to the question which the high priest addressed Him concerning His doctrine and His disciples. But one of the servants who was present at the examination wished to show his officiousness and, striking Him, said to Him with hypocritical indignation: "Is it thus that you speak to the high priest?"

If Jesus a few moments before His death had not said, "I thirst," we could have been tempted to believe that, being so intimately united to the

* John, xviii., 23.

Divinity, His humanity was not hurt to the same degree as ours by physical suffering. But this plaint of the Saviour is, as it were, the authentic attestation of the pain that all His other torments caused Him. It shows what He suffered in His body, just as His agony in the Garden of Olives and His cry of anguish to God prove the intensity of His moral sufferings.

It is important to realize this well: Jesus, who is God as His Father, is man as each of us; He is man in the whole extent and perfection of human nature. If He desired to make shine upon His countenance all that is most august and touching in the human physiognomy; if He concentrated in His gaze the flame of infinite intelligence and the charm of the deepest tenderness; if He caused to resound in His voice the divine intonations that penetrate, move, and subjugate souls, He also wished to be man in order to partake of our miseries and to suffer our infirmities. This is why we shall never understand deeply enough the horror of the torments the Saviour endured for us, and never sufficiently compassionate them. You are familiar with the picture of one of our modern painters; in an upper room, the Blessed Virgin, St. John and St. Mary Magdalen lean breathlessly over a sort of balcony that overhangs a narrow street. In the distance, they see the Son of God

pass, painfully dragging His cross in the midst of the imprecations of the crowd and the brutalities of the soldiers; and when the sorrowful cortege has disappeared, the mother and the friends of Jesus still gaze fixedly, overwhelmed by consternation and, as it were, made immovable by grief. It is thus that the saints of all ages have contemplated the Passion of Jesus Christ, and this contemplation, as St. Bonaventure says, has worked in their souls a total change of ideas, feelings and desires, and a complete moral transformation.*

And shall not we, feeble and lukewarm Christians that we are, ever accord to this God, who suffers and dies for love of us, a look of pity, an elan of thankfulness, a tear of compassion?

The Gospel tells us that Pilate caused an inscription to be written, and ordered it to be placed over the head of the crucified Redeemer. This inscription read: *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews!* and it was written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. But we, disciples and friends of Christ, upon His cross read a more beautiful motto: *He died for love of men;* and this inscription is not intelligible only to Jews, Greeks and Romans, it has been understood for eighteen centuries by men of all languages and nationalities.

* *Meditations on the Life of Christ.*

Pilate, whom the princes of the priests asked to replace the first inscription by the following: *He said: I am King of the Jews*, denied their request and answered: "What I have written is written."

Jesus had said of Himself something entirely different, and it seems that He had dictated to His beloved disciple the glorious epitaph which St. John has preserved for us in his Gospel: "*Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*" *

During three whole hours the divine crucified One hung on His cross. The fire of the fever inflamed His lips, parched His throat, and consumed His breast. He has been so weakened by His labors in carrying His cross up to the summit of Calvary! So much blood has escaped from His veins under the points of the nails that have pierced His hands and His feet! He has remained bareheaded and immovable under the sun that blinds Him and darts his rays upon His head. Tightly nailed to the cross, He cannot have even the writhings of grief, the convulsions of agony, that ordinarily agitate the bodies of those undergoing such punishment.

All these accumulated sufferings have reduced Him to extremity. He no longer knows whether

* St. John., xi, 13.

He is living or dying, He feels only one suffering, thirst, and, like the wounded on the battle-field, He asks for nothing, dreams of nothing, but a little water.

When the surgeon, the priest or the sister of charity, through the thunder of cannon and the whistling of balls, hear the sorrowful appeal of the wounded and bend over them to assist them, they are often tempted to start in affright. The mutilations are so terrible, the ravages so profound, the wounds so deep! The explosion of shells produces in the human organism such atrocious devastations! Poor friend, how you suffer! Courage, we will cure you! But he hears nothing and answers nothing.... Is he mortally wounded, or can he be saved? Will he die this evening in the hospital, or will he revisit his home and the cherished ones he left behind? He is not dreaming of this, and he says only: "I thirst," and his eyes stare wildly, and his pale face lights up when the cup, so long desired, touches his lips and he drinks long draughts.

Jesus was less charitably succored. In this crowd, there is found no one to offer Him the cup of cold water to the bestower of which He had promised Heaven as a reward. One of the assistants dipped a sponge in a vessel of vinegar, and put it to His mouth. But Jesus allowed it

only to touch His lips; it was not what He asked for. Doubtless, this hard refusal was necessary, after so many other cruelties, the better to encourage us, and the more efficaciously to console us in the sufferings, which no science can heal and no affection solace. When, then, fever devours us to our very marrow, when an interior flame consumes us, and when we shall be no longer capable of speaking to ask for drink, let us look upon the agonizing Saviour and recollect that no one consented to refresh Him.

Another lesson to learn from this meditation is that we have ever and always a practical means of sympathizing with the cruel thirst of the Saviour. This is one of the most admirable and consoling mysteries that the Gospel has revealed to men. "For I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* So will the Son of God speak when on the day of the last judgment He will sit upon the throne of His glory. Then shall the just answer Him: "Lord, when did we see thee thirsty and give thee drink?" And the King answering shall say to them: "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me."

* Matt., xxv., 34, 35.

Bossuet, alluding to this marvellous page of the Gospel, ends his third sermon on the Passion thus: "Fix your eyes upon Jesus, and let yourselves be moved by the sight of His wounds. For this I do not ask that you contemplate attentively an excellent painting of Jesus crucified; I have another picture to propose to you, a living, speaking picture, which bears the natural expression of Jesus dying: it is the poor, in whom I exhort you to contemplate to-day the Passion of Jesus Christ. You will see nowhere a more striking image. Jesus suffers in the poor; He languishes, He dies of hunger in an infinite number of poor families. All the rich should hasten to relieve such misery; but they dream of nothing else than of living at their ease, without thinking of the poverty and despair in which so many Christians are sunk."

"Let us learn," says St. John Chrysostom, "to honor Christ as He wishes to be honored; let us succor Him in the person of the poor before magnificently adorning His altars."* And, indeed, our compassion for the sufferings of the Saviour on the cross, and our devotion for His last words will have no value in His eyes, if we remain insensible to the misfortune of our brothers.

During the persecution of Valerian, in the second century, a virgin far advanced in years,

* *Homily on St. Matthew.*

named Anastasia, endured the most terrible torments. Tortured in numberless ways, the poor martyr cried out, like Jesus on the cross: "I thirst!" A man named Cyril who was there, moved by compassion, ran to fetch a cup of cool water and put it to her lips. "And are you too a Christian?" cried the proconsul. "Yes," replied Cyril. "And then," adds the Roman martyrology with sublime conciseness and eloquence, "as a reward for his charity, he received martyrdom." If God does not call us, as He did Cyril, to the honor of shedding our blood for Him, let us remember at least that Jesus promises Heaven to those who will take pity on Him in the person of their suffering brethren, and will hear the only prayer that He addressed to mankind from the cross.

But we shall not penetrate the real sentiments of the dying Saviour, and we shall receive a wrong impression of the grandeur of His love, if we do not understand what was the thirst from which He suffered the most on the cross. For, if in his body, a man can suffer cruelly from thirst, he is often tormented in his soul by a thousand desires still more sorrowful. And, while the privation of water kills us if too long prolonged, the unassuaged thirst for happiness martyrs us, if it does not actually kill us.

You must have noticed in the Gospel that Jesus Christ often gave the name of thirst to our ardent desire for happiness, and that the eternal thirst served him, in the parable of Dives, to paint the most insupportable of torments. He seems to have felt a veritable horror of the agony of thirst, the only one which, in His Passion, wrung a complaint from Him.

Do you remember His mysterious conversation with the Samaritan woman? Wearied by a long journey, Jesus came to the gates of Samaria at the hottest time of the day. He sat upon the curb of a well while His disciples went into the village to buy food. A woman approached to draw water, and the Lord said to her : " I pray you, give me to drink." And, as the woman expressed her astonishment that He, being a Jew, should address her, a Samaritan, Jesus answered her : " If thou didst know the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, give me to drink, thou, perhaps, would have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." The woman did not understand what this living water could be, and the Saviour added : " Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but he that shall drink of the water that I shall give him shall not thirst forever. But the water that I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water,

springing up unto everlasting life." * Jesus at that time really thirsted ; but the Gospel shows us that after having asked for drink, He seems to have forgotten to take it. In speaking of the eternal life, His soul neglected the things of earth, and, in the same way, when His disciples returned with food, He refused to touch it saying: "I have food to eat, which you know not of." †

Another day, He said to His disciples, always considering thirst as the suffering from which it is most important to be exempt: "He that believeth in me shall never thirst." ‡

But the most striking occasion is when on the last day of the solemn feast, and standing in the middle of the temple, Christ cried out in a loud voice: "If any man thirst, let him come to me, and drink. He that believeth in me, as the Scripture says, 'Out of his side shall flow rivers of living water.'" || This is what made Bossuet say: "His love carries Him to excess, and makes Him perform actions that seem extravagant.... We cannot doubt it, there is here a very deep feeling." §

Such was the mysterious thirst that Jesus felt

* John, iv., 4 to 15.

† John, iv., 32.

‡ John, vi, 35.

|| John, vii., 37 and 38.

§ First Sermon for the Feast of All Saints.

during His whole life, and which is to become still more intense at the moment when He is about to achieve His work of redemption. "This thirst," says St. Augustine, "was the thirst for our salvation." *

Who will enable us, I do not say to measure in all its intensity, but to catch even a glimpse of this last suffering of Jesus? Let us try at least to obtain some idea of it by referring to our own experience, and by elevating to the infinite the feelings that we ourselves have undergone.

Better than any one else the priest can represent to himself that which must have been in the soul of Christ and is called by Bossuet a "vehement passion and a love carried to excess."

On a certain day, at the first blush of youth, a man sacrifices unhesitatingly, nay, with the enthusiasm of faith, all earthly joys and hopes to preach the Gospel, to convert and save souls. The young and zealous apostle relies not upon his virtue, nor upon his personal eloquence, but upon the divine charm of Christ's doctrine, upon the supernatural power of his promises, upon the resplendent light of his revelations.

Does not the Gospel contain all truth and all virtue? Is it not the source of all hope and consolation? Is it not the fountain and guarantee

* Ps. 33. *Sitis mea salus vestra.*

of progress and earthly prosperity at the same time that it opens up the perspectives of heaven, and lifts us up to God?

Also with what a charming mixture of boldness and timidity, of precocious gravity and juvenile naïveté, the young preacher rises for his maiden efforts before the faithful. What matter to him his inexperience and his weakness? He will only have to open the Gospel before them and say: "See how divinely beautiful Christ is;" and all will be charmed and conquered.

But behold, his church is half-deserted, and among them who come to listen the greater part give to his words only a divided attention. At length, despite all his efforts, the poor zealous pastor perceives that faith has not increased in his parish, that its morals are no better, and that, in the greater number of souls that have been confided to his care, God holds a place inferior to vanity, pleasure and money. Enlarge the horizon, and the bishop or the famous preacher will confess that they have not any fewer disillusionings and sorrows. Then, for these apostolic souls, disappointed in their noblest designs, frustrated in their holiest hopes, what temptations to discouragement, what a sort of sorrowful stupefaction, what an intensity of desires of which God alone is witness, and which God alone will reward!

To carry in his hands an infinite treasury of graces and salvation, to offer it to those who are in abject poverty, that they may draw from it, and to obtain from them only a scornful refusal ! To receive from God Himself, as a sacred deposit, the mysterious bread that makes souls live unto eternal life, and to see these souls busy themselves only with cares for terrestrial affairs, harden themselves in the eager desire for gain, and, after having tasted it a single time, be unwilling to return to the blessed communion of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ !

To know the divine springs where souls can drink and nations be reborn, where families should draw happiness with virtue, and to weep to see them deserted !

To perceive before themselves great horizons, to say to men : "Look up to Heaven," and to be witness of their obstinacy in confining themselves within the narrow circle of their interests and their passions !

To hear above his head and in the depths of his soul voices, harmonies, divine concerts, that would arouse the enthusiasm of the whole human race, to say to the brethren he loves : "Be silent a moment, and listen," and to remain powerless before their indifference, if not their scorn !

To thirst for peace, justice, liberty and concord,

to burn with desire to uplift and succor all the wounded of life, and, in place of that, to see obstinate folly and hatred answer to the most sincere devotion and the most disinterested love ! What torture ! But Jesus knew it to its greatest degree.

While God seeks to speak to them, the greater part of men hear only the chatter of their kind, they are attentive only to the noise of earthly disputes, they are pleased only with the rounds of pleasure and the tumults of feasts. Indifferent to all that is above their sensations, to all that affects neither the interests of their fortune, nor the success of their enterprises, nor the security of their well-being, they go along like irrational animals, and come to die without having asked themselves why they were born, without disturbing themselves by trying to know how they are going to die.

Christ beheld, in all its terrible immensity, this sad picture, of which each of them He ordains to preach the Gospel perceives only a small part, and to so many souls that misunderstand Him and lose themselves by departing from Him, He cries with a grief beyond all imagination : “ I thirst for your salvation.”

Yes, Christ dreamed of eternal salvation for all of us, and He died to procure it for us. This is of faith ; “ Christ,” says St. Paul, “ died for all

men.”* Yes, for all without exception. Did He not solemnly proclaim it when He uttered this saying which Heaven will realize: “I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly.”†

Ah! if we wish to quench the thirst of Him who loved us so much, let us have compassion on His cruel torture. Let us lift to His lips this invisible refreshment, this drop of water, delicious, sacred, almost divine, which is called our soul. Let us not allow it to fall upon the earth, where it would be changed into slime, nor to evaporate in the fire of our evil passions; let us preserve it for Him and He will refresh Himself with it for all eternity. May the dying Christ drink our souls, just as, at our death, we wish to drink His blood, and our innermost soul will know the unspeakable thanksgiving of a God saying: “I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink.” Let us go farther still, and since Jesus thirsted for all souls, let us give ourselves resolutely to them in work, in devotedness, and in sacrifice, in order to give them to Him.

When we consider in its ensemble human life on this earth, which the Church calls a valley of tears, and when we listen to the distant murmurs

* II. Cor, v., 15.

† John, x., 10.

- of these multitudes, that which is heard above the other noises and the word that dominates all the rest is the very cry of Jesus on the cross: "I thirst."

Yes, all souls, in the extreme diversity of their conditions, thirst with the same desire for happiness. All breasts, are panting, and all lips are parched. Those who held for a moment the long-desired cup in their hands would wish to take it again, and grieve when it is broken. And, while they drink with avidity, they are sad to find the cup so shallow, and to see it empty so quickly. But what shall I say of the interior fire, the indescribable torment that devours them who, in privation and suffering, see the cup passed around from hand to hand without ever being offered to them?

But, is it not, alas! of universal experience that the greater part of poor human beings see always fly from them the happiness which they pursued with an ardor so passionate and a zeal so unquiet? To-day, nothing has come, the fountain has not yet sprung up: the rock is still dry; but to-morrow, the stone shall open and cool and limpid water shall flow out, in which the azure of Heaven will be reflected. To-morrow comes and brings nothing but a new deception. Weeks, months, years succeed one another, and it is always the

vain glimmer of the same mirage, and the weeks, the months and the years continue to deceive us.

Wearied by so many resultless researches, worn out by so many useless pursuits, man sleeps. Doubtless, sleep will make him forget his suffering, and his dreams give him what reality refuses. But the illusion of the night is not sweeter to his heart than the despair of the day, and, waking up, he finds himself as unhappy as he was before he slept.

What, then, did Christ wish to promise us when, standing in the middle of the Temple, He cried loudly: "If any one thirst, let him come unto me and drink?"

From that very expression should we not conclude that He has not promised happiness to those who seek it far from Him?

Those who do this are like shipwrecked sailors who, at the moment when the ship goes down, take refuge in a small boat with some provisions, but without water. For the first few days, they endure thirst courageously; but soon they look with avidity on the transparent waves where their fevered hand is cooled, and which they know are powerless to aid them. Soon the moment comes when the fire that devours their entrails is too intense, and when the vertigo of thirst becomes irresistible. Then they bend over, dipping their

lips in this bitter and corrosive water which can only aggravate their sufferings and hasten their death, and, the more they drink, the more do they feel themselves interiorly burned.

It is thus that some men degrade or destroy themselves in abandoning themselves blindly to their passions, for this water, which they think will refresh you, can do nothing but irritate their thirst, and is changed into poison.

And to His friends, what promises did Christ make for happiness in the present life?

These promises are all summed up in one word of which humanity, even Christian humanity, has not sufficiently understood the great value. "Seek ye, therefore, first the Kingdom of God and His justice; and all these things shall be added unto you."* May the day come when men, all together, will seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice and then more than three-fourths of the evils from which they suffer will disappear.

Jesus, however, does not wish that His friends should delay among terrestrial pleasures, even those which God authorizes and blesses; besides, He has not hidden from them how they should bear their cross with Him, if they desire to be His disciples.

Finally, in order to prevent us from attaching

* Matt., VI., 33.

ourselves too closely to the pure and noble joys of earth, He wishes us to be always ready to die and, consequently, to leave them. But if He asks us to dwell each day upon the cruel separation of death, it is not to leave us for ever in the solitude of the heart; it is to establish us finally in the eternal and happy unity of absolutely perfect love. "Now," says He to His disciples, "you are sad, but soon your sadness will be changed into joy and this joy no man shall take from you." *

And then how easily and superabundantly will we be consoled for so many sorrowful privations, so many forced sacrifices, so many days and nights passed in tears! How little will it matter to us that the earth refused us, like Jesus on the cross, a drop of cold water, when, according to His promise, "the Lord will make us drink of the torrent of His pleasures." † When, then, shall we know this definitively? What we need are goods that nothing can take away from us, happiness without vicissitude, and lasting joys. But all these are not of the earth, and Jesus warns us that such treasures are found only in the Kingdom of Heaven.

See how the Saviour speaks at the last solemn feast that immediately preceded His death:

* John, xvi., 20.

† Psalm xxxv., 8.

“ Amen I say to you ; I will not drink from henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day, when I shall drink it new with you in the Kingdom of my Father.”* Behold the celestial beverage which Christians should desire to drink eternally with Christ and with all the elect, in the ecstasy of light and happiness, as He desired to drink it with them.

Understand this well, they alone will feel at their last hour this blessed thirst to see and possess God, this ardent desire for Heaven, that makes them love death, who, during their life, often approached Jesus on the cross to hear Him say : “ I thirst for your souls,” and who will come frequently in the Holy Communion to drink the divine blood of which He said Himself: “ It shall be shed for the remission of sins, and for the salvation of a great number.”

* Matt., xxvi., 28 and 29.

SIXTH MEDITATION.

THE MASTER-PIECE OF GOD AND THE MASTER-PIECE OF MAN.

It is finished.—John, XIX, 30.

No horizon is comparable, in extent and brightness, with that which the Christian faith opens before our eyes.

When the wondrous incarnation was accomplished, God Himself could say, and every creature enlightened by God repeat after Him, as Jesus did with His dying breath: “It is finished.”

Yes, all the elements of creation already concentrated and glorified in human nature, and the divine nature itself, concentrated and glorified in Jesus Christ, have been united. Now, all that was distant has been brought near, all gulfs have been filled up, all extremes have met; not in confusion, but in perfect harmony and absolute accord.

Open the Gospel of St. John: what a magnificent beginning! and does it not seem to resound throughout the universe, to the end of time, like the sound of a glorious trumpet? “In the begin-

ning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him: and without Him was made nothing that was made." But see how this splendor abases itself: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us."

So God, the creator of all the universe, is the victim we see to-day expiring for us upon the cross, and He who is dying is the author Himself of life. On Calvary, just as at the birth of the world, the eternal Word saw that its work was perfect; and this is the reason It said: "It is finished."

When at the call of God chaos had awoke and opened to give passage to the ray of light and the blade of grass, as well as to the numberless hosts of suns and the fathomless depths of the ocean; to the imperceptible insect as well as the intelligent and free being who bears in himself the divine likeness, a great applause had resounded, thrilling the whole universe. "God," says Genesis, "saw that it was good and very good." And when Jesus had achieved the work of our redemption, He said: "It is finished."

Creating or dying, before His two master-pieces God gave the same testimony of Himself. For, as far as our poor, weak, human intellect can represent to itself this incomprehensible prodigy of

creation, I imagine that in presence of this miracle of miracles, joy should be inexpressibly increased in the bosom of the Infinite and in Heaven, already inhabited by angels.

Does not the semblance of astronomical science to which the genius of men has come, teach us that this earth, on which we are mere points, is itself a point in the immensity of space? Do we not know that our globe is one of the smallest planets that move in the orbit of the sun: that beyond this sun there are millions, perhaps milliards of other suns, around which gravitate millions, or perhaps milliards, of other planets? And do not all men, philosophers, theologians, savants, thinkers and poets of all nations and schools of doctrine say to us: Is it likely that God created so great a number of magnificent dwellings to leave them desolate, uninhabited, sterile, without the light of intelligence, the development of free activity, the halo of virtue and the ecstasy of love? And is not the imagination overwhelmed and the soul stupefied in presence of such magnificence?

This evening, when in a splendid and clear sky will appear the host of luminous stars that seem to arise a second time from nothingness at the call of a magic power, consider that the creator of all these marvels has deigned to abase Himself to us

and that the Omnipotent has desired to be nailed to a cross.

Yes, O dying Saviour, it was at thy command that, from inert chaos and silent darkness, arose these beings, radiant with beauty and palpitating with life, of which the most beautiful and perfect know thee, adore thee, and love thee, and which, reunited in the same glory, will know and love themselves forever in thee. Didst thou not say: "In my Father's house there are many mansions," and also: "There shall be one fold and one shepherd?" A day will come when the elect of all the worlds, an innumerable multitude of men and angels,* will sing together the praises of the God who made them; and, forever, the Creator will see that it was good, and, forever, He will congratulate Himself for having consummated in the perfect unity and eternal ecstasy of infinite beauty.

To cause worlds to spring from chaos, to wrest matter and spirit from nothing, to cause, in every direction, high and low, life to quiver, intelligence to brighten and love to blossom; who would not be delighted with this divine occupation? Do you not see that men in their smallness and infirmity, try to imitate the very power of God? Poets, artists, savants, do not all seek to do something

* "A great multitude which no man could number."—*Apocalypse*, VII., 9.

grand, to astonish their contemporaries and leave behind them the imperishable glory of an immortal work? What musician does not dream of carrying with him, in the vibrations which his soul communicates to an insensible instrument, the souls of his hearers, and of lifting them out of themselves to heights unknown and worlds that are new? And what holy pride, what sublime joy for the man who contemplates the master-piece of his hand! It is Raphael, himself astonished and ravished by the ideal beauty of his Madonnas. It is Michel-Angelo, almost fear-stricken before the *Moses*, which is admired in a church in Rome, this supernatural giant who in his marble-eyes has more life than we in our living ones.

But, St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas affirm that the master-piece accomplished by Jesus Christ, who became, according to the bold word of Isaias, * “the least and the most miserable of men,” is incomparably more difficult and beautiful than that of the creation. †

It is easy to understand the reason for this: creation is an act of joy; redemption an act of sorrow. In the creation appeared, above all the love that satisfies itself, in the redemption, the love

* Isaias, LIII., 3.

† Majus opus est justificatio impii quam creatio cœli et terræ.—Ia., IIa., 9-113, 9.

that sacrifices itself. To call all beings into existence, a single word sufficed God, but, to redeem men from sin, Jesus Christ gave thirty-three years of labor, terminated by the most ignominious and cruel torture. To impress upon the human soul the three great traits of the divine resemblance: intelligence, liberty and love, the Creator had only to let fall upon it a reflection of Himself. But when the soul, by its own fault, has allowed its primitive beauty to fade, when, through selfishness, impurity, lying or hatred it has become ugly, when it no longer reproduces the ideal type, then, to try to repair its ruins, prodigies were necessary compared to which the creation of the universe was only a trifle.

These prodigies Jesus accomplished, and, to give to Himself the testimony which consoles Him when He considers all that He has done and suffered, He congratulates Himself on never having drawn back from any humiliation, or rejected any sacrifice, and He says: "It is finished, my work is complete, no one could add anything to it, and the Infinite Himself can go no farther."

O man ! He seems to say, I respect your liberty. Like those whom I see around me on Calvary ; you remain master to believe or blaspheme ; now hesitate no longer, but come near to my cross and consider attentively what I suffer. Put your hand

upon my heart, before it has ceased to beat, feel with what tenderness it is animated for you, and your hardness will be changed into love, your indifference into adoration. Do you find that I have not done enough, and do you ask me to suffer still more? Would you wish to add a single wound to those which have torn my shoulders, would you tell the soldiers to go to me to strike me again and spit once more in my face?

Come, therefore, before His cross, innumerable multitudes of human generations; come to salute your Chief gloriously fallen upon the battle-field, and if a single man, when Jesus will cry out: "It is finished," would dare to answer: "You could have done more," in truth I would fear for this man, and, involuntarily, I would repeat this word, more terrifying still because it has been uttered by infinite mercy: "It would be better for him if he had never been born." *

Christians, let us be full of thanksgiving, let us open our hearts to the emotion of the supreme moment and let us ask of God the grace of not dying before we have given ourselves entirely to Him, who, to save us, has used all the resources, the inventions, the marvels of sovereign mercy and infinite love.

If you should not admire the ocean when its

* Matt., xxvi., 24.

foam-flecked waves, one overtopping the other, hurl themselves upon the shore, like white squadrons that return incessantly to the charge, or when, tranquil and still, it seems to say to the heavens : " I am as pure as you ; " if you would look with indifferent eye upon the snow-clad Alpine heights, when their glaciers reflect in a thousand different tints the rays of the setting sun that leaves them with regret ; if the night, when the whole vault of Heaven is covered with its starry vesture, dazzling our eyes with a million diamonds that scintillate as though to say : " We are the source of life," leaves you insensible ; if you could pass before the master-piece of human beauty without feeling that indescribable emotion, that mysterious thrill of which the ultimate cause is God's likeness in us, I would say to you : What scenes do you look for here below and what new revelations of beauty ? And you who dream of something more beautiful than Christ, and sweeter than His Gospel, learn that all beauty and love have been consummated by the death of this God who loves you ; after Him, look for, and dream of nothing else.

The Son of God, before ascending to the right hand of His Father, could vouch for Himself that He had achieved His work. " Jesus," says Bossuet, " goes over all the prophecies to see if there

remains anything to be done. Seeing at last that the measure is complete, and that nothing remains but His death in order to disarm justice, He says : "It is finished."

But the Saviour deigns to call us to the partaking of His glory, and we have not been created only to pass with Him upon the earth "doing good." * Jesus Himself gave this wonderful law of our moral development when He opened before us this endless perspective : "Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect." † Not only should the soul progress indefinitely here below in virtue and in Heaven in happiness, but the Saviour promises us, on condition of our leaning upon Him through faith, a marvellous fruitfulness and an incalculable power. What a joy for us Christians to discover in our Gospel horizons so vast, and to hear from the lips of Jesus Himself words that we would never be able to believe if they had been uttered by a man, but which are true and adorable coming from the Eternal Truth : "He who believes in me will do the works that I do ; and greater than these shall he do." ‡ Extraordinary, but infallible promise, which I cannot begin to explain here, but which should arouse in our

* Acts, x., 38.

† Matt., v., 48.

‡ John, xiv., 12.

hearts a great enthusiasm and an irresistible clan.

But, alas! after I have thrilled with hope in hearing this divine revelation, I have fallen again, humiliated, overcome and crushed by chagrin and shame, in considering my works, and finding them so imperfect, so worthless, often so wicked. Let us avow it very humbly; if we had to appear before God, you, when you read these lines, and I at the moment I write them, could we say like the dying Saviour: "It is finished," that is: I have done my work?

St. Paul, with the assurance of perfect charity, which has the right to expect everything, because it has given everything, has dared to write: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. As to the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just judge, will render to me in that day: and not only to me, but to them also who love His coming."* But we, how often in the combat against our passions have we not thrown down our arms? Cowardly soldiers, have we not often retreated instead of marching ahead? Nay! Have we not been seen sometimes, miserable deserters, stealing furtively from the camp and going over to the enemy? How many shameful and criminal actions have we committed? What shall

* Tim., iv., 7 and 8.

I say of our infidelities, our negligences, our prevarications of every kind? How much good have we left undone which we could have and, consequently, should have accomplished? What an exclusive care for ourselves, and what indifference in regard to others! What sluggishness in work, carelessness in devotion and tepidity in piety! What mediocrity in virtue, what desolating poverty in merits! And are we ignorant of the fact that in our good actions themselves, there is such a mixture of personal interest, self-love, search for the esteem of men, and foolish vanity? Yes, alas! we are deeply miserable, and why should we not repeat the sublime and startling avowal of a St. Paul, "The good that I will I do not, but the evil that I will not, that I do."*

And what then? Are we going to leave this life with empty hands? Will it be said that we have not been able to understand God's great plans for us, that we have buried the treasure which the Father of the family confided to our care to make it increase a hundredfold? To whom shall we have recourse in our destitution? By what means shall we supply our indigence? How shall we redeem our almost irreparable losses! Ah! if one richer than we would only consent to pay our debts! Lazy and awkward workmen, who

* Rom., vii., 19.

have not known how to employ the admirable elements which Providence has placed in our hands, if we were only fortunate enough to find a master, patient as well as skilful, who would repair our spoiled work and give our unfinished production the last touch which is like the signature of genius ! Poor race without credit or authority, if we could but obtain the protection of some influential person, whose favor would supply the insufficiency of our claims and would go surety for us !

It is for this that the Eternal Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us "full of grace and truth." He suffered the better to compassionate our miseries, but in order to remedy them, He remained the infinitely rich and powerful God. Now we are no longer alone, and the blessed mystery of God made man has put an end to the ancient curse which resounded so dolorously in the hearts of a great number. "Woe to him that is alone, for when he falleth, he hath none to lift him up."*

Yes, woe to the reason delivered to itself, for it risks losing itself in the labyrinth of difficulties and doubts which it is powerless to resolve ! Woe to the will which leans only on its own weakness, because, sooner or later, it will crush itself against the obstacles, humanly insurmountable, which it will meet on its course ! Woe to the heart

* Ecclesiastes, iv., 10.

abandoned to its own inclinations, because it will not have the power to withdraw itself from the attractions here below and rise to duty by sacrifice ! Woe to the sinner who is alone, because no one will cure his wound or withdraw from it the poisoned dart that envenoms it and will finish by making it mortal !

Isaias, seven centuries before the event, had announced to humankind the end of this terrible solitude. Behold ! a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means : God with us.* God with us, in order that we may partake of His sufferings and His glory,† and that, having traversed death with Him, He may associate us with Him in the triumph of His resurrection and the joys of His eternal Kingdom.‡

Let us, then, unite ourselves to Jesus Christ, and, in a sentiment of confidence and penitence, let us fly to the foot of the cross. Having become His co-heirs, let us boldly enter into possession of His merits, and we, who are nothing and have done nothing, when dying can say without deception and without presumption : I have done my work, it is finished ! Ah ! how good it will be, at

* Isaias, vii., 14, and Matt., i., 23.

† Rom., viii., 17.

‡ Rom., vi., 5.

this terrible moment, to hide ourselves behind Him, just as a recruit ignorant of combats, trembles involuntarily when he arrives on the battlefield, but, attaching himself to an intrepid chief, feels his courage rise again by contact with the other's bravery. Alone, he would have retreated, but, borne up by example, he marches bravely forward, and he will receive his share of honor and victory. Dear crucified Lord, who art about to die, I shall remember then that thou art life eternal. United to thee, identified with thee, full of the remembrance of thy love, I forget death that frightens me and my sins that terrify me; dying I feel myself live and, a criminal, I feel myself cleansed.

Christians, I conjure you, when at your last hour you look tremblingly back upon the past years, when the remembrance of your faults arises to discourage you, not to let yourselves be troubled by this sorrowful spectacle. Recall this beautiful and consoling word of Père Lacordaire: "Innocence is a drop of water in the world, repentance is the ocean which envelopes and saves it."* With a lively faith look upon the Saviour who drives away from your death-bed the phantom of your iniquities. Hear Him saying for you what He said on Calvary: "Father, forgive them, for they know

* *Sainte Marie-Madeleine.* (Epilogue.)

not what they do." He has expiated all, He has repaired all, He has perfected all and He wishes us to be with Him in Paradise. Whither He goes, we go. "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from Him." *

Christ, however, does not wish to substitute Himself for us and so make all personal merit and recompense impossible; He intends only to aid us in the severe combats we have to undergo. But, of all the merits which we can acquire, there is one, the most precious, the most decisive of all which He wishes to leave us. For neither the principles of reason, nor the assurances of the Gospel can take from man the instinctive fear of death. God allows it to be so, to remind us that death is a punishment, and also that the mere acceptance of this terrible pain can suffice to repair and expiate everything. Death, in fact, reunites and sums up all sacrifices and immolations.

Moreover, I do not hesitate to say to those who die in the faith and love of Jesus Christ: Be reassured in hearing this blessed promise: "And every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for

* Rom., viii., 38.

my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold and shall possess life everlasting."* Doubtless this word is meant particularly for the heroic souls, who, to follow Jesus Christ, have renounced all terrestrial aspirations; but the goodness of God authorizes all Christians to find in it a consolation.

Yes, if you wish it, thou mother who sayest so heart-rending and tender a farewell to thy dear children, thou husband who leavest here below all alone her who lived only for thee, friends until now inseparable, and you also who are attached to life for life itself, for its pleasures, its duties, its labors and its glories, in consenting to leave all for the name of Jesus Christ, you will repair by a single act all the past, and will reestablish between your soul and God the accord broken by sin, and this soul, having become beautiful again, will reflect eternally His infinite beauty.

Finally, there is a last meaning of this word, and I content myself with merely indicating it. "It is finished" means: a few moments more and the torture will be over. "It is finished" signifies this: there is only another drop in the bottom of the cup of bitterness, and soon I shall drink from the cup of eternal joys the mysterious wine which I have desired to drink with my elect.

Courage, beloved Saviour! Thy soul is about

* St. Matt., XIX., 29.

to depart at last from this terrible agony, and thy half-broken limbs will be forever detached from the cross. It is finished, so thy suffering is at an end, and we, when our hour will come, will say with an elan of unspeakable joy: It is the end of sin.

SEVENTH MEDITATION.

FILIAL ABANDONMENT INTO THE HANDS OF GOD.

Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.—Luke, XXIII., 46.

The last and sweetest word of Jesus is as the final chord that ends the divine melody begun by the prayer for pardon. In the great musical works, the principal theme announced from the beginning and developed afterwards into modulations of an infinite variety is reproduced at the end of the symphony with a still grander character. Thus it is that the last strophe of the divine hymn destined by God to quiet our agony and calm our death brings back the first word pronounced by Jesus Christ at the beginning of His crucifixion: “Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.” Father! therefore I feel that I am truly Thy Son and truly Godlike Thee. But, at the most terrible and decisive hours of the expiation, the man of sorrows, the abandoned sufferer on the cross, the victim crushed under the burden of our iniquities,

does not consider himself any longer as the Son and does not dare to say : Father ! Now, speaking the language of an ordinary man, Jesus cries out : My God ! my God ! with the strange and despairing energy of one that feels himself at a great distance from him whose assistance he invokes and whose aid he implores.

May it be the same for us, brethren, and if, during our life, our faults or our misfortunes, or both together, have made us forget the blessed quality of sons of God, let us, before we die, repeat with confidence and joy : “ Our Father who art in Heaven ! ” just as we said it when our mother herself joined our hands and taught us to make the sign of the cross. The Christian soul awakens here to love and light, and it is not right that it should go to sleep in indifference and darkness.

Were you not anxious to teach us, Lord, from the first day of your preaching, that he who is not born again cannot see the Kingdom of God ? * And, later, did you not add : “ Unless you become like little children you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven ? ” † And when you deigned, with the condescension and tenderness of a mother, to teach us yourself how to pray, is it

* John, III., 2.

† Matt., XVIII., 3.

not still the sweet name of father which you placed upon the lips of all, from the infant in the crib to the man in the prime of life and the old man of a hundred years? Give us this day our daily bread, said we to our Heavenly Father when it was question of living, and when it will be question of dying, let us repeat with Jesus: "Into thy hands I commend my spirit." Take it, nourish it with the bread and give it to drink of the wine who confer immortality.

Father, I give you back my soul; therefore I believe firmly in the existence of God, my creator and my father, and of my immortal soul. All do not believe this, alas! and, against all likeness, after eighteen centuries of Christianity, men are found who, when dying, do not dare to say with St. Paul: "We do not wish to be unclothed: we wished to be clothed with immortality, in the life that shall never end." *

Poor atheists and materialists, who will ever have pity on you as you deserve? Have you not taken from death its dignity and its value, you who disappear from the world's stage like mute characters and unconscious actors? Every man, in virtue of his liberty, can give or refuse his soul to God. By making a bad use of this liberty, you have sadly deprived yourselves of the happiness

* II., Cor. v., 4.

which Christ placed above all the others saying :
“ If it is blessed to receive, it is more blessed to give.” *

Yes, indeed, when man has arrived at believing seriously that there is nothing above and beyond matter, he dies like an animal which they drive from the pasture into the abattoir, without apprehension, without consciousness, and without dignity. Among all the disgraces and dangers into which man can fall, I know of none more terrible and humiliating.

But for us Christians, as for our dear Saviour, death is the solemn conclusion, the magnificent dénouement of a drama in which our eternal destiny is enacted. We believe firmly, we know for certain, that we bear in us an immaterial and imperishable principle. In dying, we have something else to do than to give up our body as food for worms, or as a prey for the dissolution of the grave ; we have to restore our soul to Him who created it, and who asks us for it as a friend after a long absence looks for the return of his friend.

Others, without ceasing to believe in God and the soul, profess to forget death and live on this earth as though there was nothing beyond it. We may well apply to them the saying of Fénelon :
“ They do not think of death for fear of saddening

* Acts, xx., 35.

themselves; but death will be sad only for them who have never thought of it." Of them we could say that they do not die, but allow themselves to be killed.

But what keeps the greatest number from filially restoring their souls to God is that they live voluntarily in sin, and that, despite their efforts to distract themselves, they are unable to smother their remorse, keep down the fear of punishment, or lose the feeling of their responsibility. It is for these unfortunates that St. Paul said: "It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*

In my foolish boldness, I have despised the divine law, I have been pitiless towards my brethren. I feel distinctly that my soul, formerly so pure, has become hideous, that God shrinks from it, and I tremble to appear before Him. To think of placing my infamy in presence of the perfect holiness! To think of showing on the great day of the eternal light, before the angels and the elect, my deceptions, my treasons, my cowardice, my ignominious acts of every kind!

O cruel God, it is not yet time to take back my soul, grant me some delay, do not disturb my pleasures, I have not yet had enough of the joy of life, I need some days more. But no, it is to-day, at

* Heb., x., 31.

this predestined time, at this precise minute. Not an hour of respite, not time to say a farewell to what I love, not leisure to cast a glance behind. What anguish in such a state to feel oneself dragged resistingly to the abyss by an irresistible power, and, then, how terrible it is to fall into the hands of the living God !

The friends of the Gospel have heard sweeter words. O marvellous transformation of death ! O incomparable and divine poetry of our holy religion ! It is no longer a frightful phantom that prowls around our death-bed like a lion seeking to devour its prey, it is the spouse who comes, and the friends of the spouse cry to the bride : " Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet him." * But why does the bridegroom come, if not because he loves, and why will the bride, feeling herself loved, fear him ? Go forth to meet him. Would you not go forth to meet your beloved though it were necessary to leave a palace and descend from a throne ? And how many times since the human heart obeyed the primordial and sacred law of love have they who were rich humbled themselves to a poor beloved ; they who were free, to a slave ; they who were surrounded by all pleasures, to the victim of all miseries ?

Go forth from the dwelling of this visible world

* Matt., xxv., 6.

which is to last only for a time, for the spouse wishes to bring you with him to the eternal dwellings where he lives, and, according to the word of St. Paul, "The things which are not seen are eternal."*

Such is, for those who love Christ, the blessed metamorphosis of death. Before I loved Him, I feared death, now I have a taste, a desire, a passion for it, and I understand at last this saying of St. Paul: "For to me to die is gain."†

When I try to represent to myself the ineffable joy that Jesus must have felt when, escaping at last, and forever, from sorrow, He restores His soul into His Father's hands, it seems to me that in uniting ourselves intimately to Him, we can at our last moments rejoice in the midst of suffering, and feel ourselves reborn into the true life under the stroke that seems to kill us.

Christians, let us not wait for the final hour to say to God, like Jesus: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." Let us, from now on, retire it from all base occupations, from all vile things, from all shameful habits; let us separate it, so to speak, from our body, to offer it to Him who, perhaps, will soon ask us for it. The Saviour has warned us solemnly that we know neither the day,

* II Cor., IV., 18.

† Philipp., I., 21.

nor the hour, nor the circumstances of our death. Let us place ourselves, from henceforth, beyond the danger of surprise. At the last moment, we shall not, perhaps, have the strength or time for reflection: let us give ourselves to-day, in the plenitude of our intelligence and liberty, recalling this beautiful saying of our sacred writings: "God loveth a cheerful giver." *

Was not the young priest in the deep perception and clear view of truth, who, feeling himself grievously stricken, wrote: "It is hard not to fear death, if one looks on it in its terrible aspects. It is easier to love it, because it has phases adorably beautiful and amiable, and we can look at it in that light. Far from finding in the thought of death a source of gloomy sadness, by your grace, O Lord, I shall draw from it the motive for a joyful and energetic liberty?" And elsewhere: We must not receive death with resignation, for that is a measure difficult to preserve, but with enthusiasm and joy: this is more in the instincts of our heart.† And, later on, he uttered this touching prayer: "O Jesus, give me love, the love which has its secrets, the love which transforms all things even to death, and especially death itself;"‡

* II Cor., ix., 7.

† *Henry Perreye*, by Père Gratry.

‡ *Way of the Cross*.

and finally, near his last hour, he said to me: "I see now how useful it was for me to accustom myself to think often of death as a sweet and desirable thing."* And, in fact, is not looking on death as the return of the soul to its creator the only truly Christian and philosophical idea?

Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit! But whence came this spirit, twenty, thirty, or forty years ago, if not from thy creative hands? And why will they not be to-day as then equally beneficent? Is God less tenderly our Father when He recalls us to Himself to make us partake of His eternal happiness than on the day when He brought us forth from nothing and assigned us our post in the battle of life? And, besides, when our God humbled Himself towards us even to the extent of uniting Himself personally to our human nature, did not these omnipotent hands bless little children and cure the sick and, to save us, did not Jesus permit these same hands to be nailed to the cross? Ah! when we see upon them the bloody marks of sorrow and love, it is easy to yield ourselves up to their sweet clasp without inquietude or apprehension. *

Lord, for a long time I have felt that thou art the most tender, the most faithful, the most enlightened, the most powerful of all my friends. To

* *Derniers jours de Henry Perreyve.*

my earthly friends, who will continue after me to work and suffer here below, I can leave nothing but my memory and my mortal remains. I know that they will take these remains and treat them with honor, and that the Church of God, so compassionate on all our miseries, will not refuse its blessing to this sad and senseless corpse. But whether it be placed in a rich sepulchre, or thrown, like the bodies of so many thousands of martyrs, as food to the beasts, will not matter much. I am aware that, a little sooner or later, the atoms which compose it will return into the universal circulation and will be carried along in the endless whirlpool of forces which unite to separate and separate to reunite, which sometimes associate and sometimes fly asunder, until the day when, by God's order, the soul will choose for itself the elements of its spiritualized body. But in the midst of this reposeless agitation and this vertiginous motion, I know also that the soul remains unalterable in its constitution, incorruptible in its essence, identical in its personality, superior and inaccessible by its immortality to these numberless transformations and extraordinary changes. My soul is my real and only treasure, and the Saviour has said that the acquiring of the whole world would not compensate me for its loss.* Sweet indeed is it to me

* Matt., xvi., 26.

to confide it at last to God who alone can place it in safety and give to all its faculties their development, to all its powers their scope, to all its desires their satisfaction.

What, in fact, is the actual domain of our knowledge in comparison with the infinite extent of truth? Each of us here below knows only the thousandth part of the human sciences, and all the human sciences together make but a millionth part of the science of God. But when thou shalt have received my soul, O beloved Father, it will know all, since it will awaken in thy radiant light.

And are not our hearts still more destitute and suffering than our intelligences? But when my heart will belong entirely to thee, when it will be consummated with thee and with them whom it loves in the unity which thy divine Son promised us, then only will it begin to be truly happy.

Father, take my soul, and from this inexhaustible and unexplored fountain cause to spring rays of light, happiness and love, rays of power itself, for it is written that God "will do eternally the will of his elect." *

Take my soul and establish it at last in the perfection of its eternal type, which is the resemblance of thy sovereign beauty. Here on earth

* Psalm CXLIV., 19.

this poor soul vacillates perpetually between good and evil, between light and darkness, between joy and discouragement. Yesterday its purity resembled that of the angels, and, to-day, sin has made it so sad, so disfigured, so unrecognizable, that it no longer dares to look at itself and trembles before the gaze of God. O beloved Saviour! thou hast said: "When I shall be lifted above the earth, I will draw all to me." * Draw, then, my soul, and detach it in advance from everything that could separate it from thee. Thou hast had the glory of dying while praying, speaking, pardoning and loving; grant me the grace of obtaining a death like thine. No, I do not wish to depart this life in the blindness of a being that knows not itself, nor in the sadness of a slave loaded with chains which his master heaps on him against his will.

Christians, let us be high-minded, intelligent and noble; let us dispose everything beforehand; let us preside in person over the ordering of this impressive journey, of this voyage whence no one returns. Let us be the kings of our souls, the masters of our destiny, the sovereigns of our eternity, which it is necessary to enrich even to the infinite, since our faith teaches us that we are "the co-heirs of Jesus Christ and the heirs of God." †

* St. John., xii., 33.

† *Epistle to the Romans*, viii., 17.

But what is to be said of the crime of those who conceal from their friends and relatives the first and most important of all the truths which it is important for men to know? In what terms should be characterized the cruelty, sometimes unconscious, of these traitors through compassion, and often enough, through lack of courage?

I pray you, you who claim to love him, not to prevent this man from dying like a man, this Christian from dying like a Christian. Out of respect for the greatness of the human soul, let this soul accept and consummate of itself its final holocaust! Out of pity for this brother, to whom you can give nothing, for whom you can do nothing, deprive him not of the occasion of his greatest and perhaps his only merit. Take not from him this last day, this last minute, this last act of repentance, this last prayer, this last outpouring of love, which may repair the errors and iniquities of his whole life; this last cry to God, which of itself can save him! In truth, I know nothing more absurd, more criminal and more hateful than this barbarous custom which prevails in so many families, than this gloomy conspiracy which consists in keeping away every religious word and thought and every consideration of eternity from the bed of suffering and the pillow of the dying. When you prevent the priest of Jesus Christ from

going to this poor distressed soul, you commit in regard to the unfortunate man who is about to appear before his Judge a shameful abuse of confidence. You steal from him the Gospel, Confession, the Eucharist, to all of which he has a right, since he has been baptized, and has once, at least, communicated on the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Even Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, Plutarch, Seneca and so many others knew well, and said with an admirable eloquence, that death is a serious thing, that its office is solemn, that it imposes a great responsibility, that its dénouement is not annihilation, but immortality. They knew and said that at death the soul is not reduced to nothing, but that it returns to the heavenly spheres where it will be rewarded or punished, according to whether it will be dishonored by vice or ennobled by virtue. They knew and proved by their examples, like Socrates when dying, that at the approach of eternity our thought should ascend instead of descending, that despite appearances the faculties are sharpened instead of being benumbed, that the soul is a sun that passes to another atmosphere and not a star that is quenched.

O my beloved brethren, let us take henceforth the firm resolution to rise above the cowardice, the common trifling in the presence of death, and

let us not consent to dishonor ourselves by deaths that would have made pagans blush. When a dangerous illness shall impose upon us the sacred duty of looking death in the face, let us not appear disquiet, weak and cast down, as if death were going to precipitate us into the unfathomable and incomprehensible abyss of nothingness. Let us not try to blind ourselves in a fatal ignorance; but, on the contrary, let us beseech those who assist us, and the physician who attends us, to tell us the whole truth. Let us have the courage to make it a sacred duty of conscience for them, and instead of saying with trembling: "Am I lost?" "Must I die?" let us speak as Christians, and say: "Shall I render my soul to God?"

Let us repeat the beautiful expression which I had the joy of hearing on the lips of a feeble child, but one that was a strong Christian: "Oh! no, nothing is ended for me, but all is about to begin! I am now about to enter life, for here below it is not life, but death."

Friends, parents who love me and who at this last hour give me more than ever proofs of this love, aid me to die well, assist me in this terrible conflict, and repeat in my ear the sweet and adorable words of my dying Saviour.

If you act thus, be sure that your kindred, when they see your faith, when they witness your

courage, will also arise to the level of your soul, and who knows but that your example will lead them from this day into the way of salvation? Do not sink yourself, like some who die, even Christians, in a reserve and silence that keep the last ray of their souls from enlightening, consoling, perhaps transforming those who weep at their bedside. Do not delay to take farewell of those whom you leave, and salute those who await you on high, until your poor body is struggling in the last convulsions and pangs of death. Do not delay until all your strength leaves you and your exhausted body drags your mind down with it into an irresistible and unconquerable sleep. On the contrary, those who feel themselves dying should always be the first to break this painful, sad, definitive silence which too often surrounds and darkens the hour which the eternal light should already illumine. Does not the honor of speaking the first words belong to him who is highest in dignity? Is it not for the superior to give his instructions to those who are below him? Now, whatever may be the inequality of conditions, and the difference even of ages, in the room of a dying man it is he who holds the first place. A king when present stands bareheaded at the death of the least of his servants, the humblest of his subjects. Never will the words of Jesus

Christ be more capable of moving our hearts than at the unique moment when, according to the so strong expression of the apostle St. Peter, He is going "to drink death,"* to drain from it its bitterness, and to open for us the gates of a blessed eternity. Does not the sovereign dignity of death give alike something to the words of men? Do not they who die, according to the example of Jesus Christ, find words of penetration, of power, sometimes of majesty, with which to console and to exhort, yea, to amaze and subdue those whom they leave after them? It is because then the soul arrived on the threshold of eternity, and "seeing God beyond death," no longer perceives the world, with its joys and sorrows, save as an imperceptible point. She no longer hears the bustle of the crowd or the din of human conversation and business; she listens only to the mysterious and pressing calls of the spouse, who draws near and invites her to sit with Him at the eternal banquet.

It is said in the Gospel of St. Luke, that after the death of Jesus Christ, when the crowd departed, sad and silent, from Calvary, "all struck their breast."† Let us, Christians, imitate these Jews, frightened and repentant of the crime they had just committed; let us not forget that our sins

* First Epistle, III., 22.

† Luke, XXIII., 48.

have, on their part, aggravated the sufferings of Jesus.

But let the feeling of gratitude dominate all the others in us, and let it annihilate even the recollection of our sins. May the grace of God cause to penetrate to the innermost recesses of our hearts these last words of our dying Lord; may they enter there, according to the words of St. Paul, like a two-edged sword and cause an incurable wound of love. Let us never look on a crucifix without representing to ourselves that Jesus addresses us from His cross one of these blessed words. May they encourage us in time of trial, may they console us in suffering and illness, may they illumine our agony, and transfigure our death.

A priest to whom it seems to me should be applied what St. John said of himself: "A disciple whom Jesus loved,"* and who died at thirty-four years of age, has known how to realize the noble things that he had said of death, has written this profound and touching page in his Meditations on the way of the cross. He puts upon the lips of the Saviour Himself these beautiful words, by which I am happy to end this book: "Christian soul, see in my agony, thy agony; in my death, thy death; in my victory, thy victory. When I

* St. John, xx., 2.

was upon the cross, I foresaw the deaths of all my children, and I have united all these deaths to mine in order to sanctify them and make of them a single sacrifice. Against the fears of death, take refuge, plunge into, and be immersed in, the remembrances of my Passion. Do not fear that thy confidence will deceive thee. I will be there, besides, when thy last hour will come, and when thou remittest thy soul into the hands of the Father, in a spirit of abandonment and sacrifice, I will repeat, by thy mouth, these words which I addressed Him from the cross, not only for myself alone, but at the same time for all my elect: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit; my spirit, that is to say, all the souls which by charity make only one soul with mine: "*Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum.*"

APPENDIX.

NOTE I.

The Gospel does not say what was the impression produced on the soul of the blaspheming thief by the generous words of this defender of Jesus Christ. St. Augustine, and Christian tradition after him, shows in the "bad thief" a terrible example of final impenitence. However, it is among the secrets which God reserves to Himself, and which He does not permit the greatest geniuses, or even the greatest saints, to penetrate.

When it is a matter of pronouncing upon the terrible question of the eternal loss of a soul, not only in the name of charity, but also in that of justice, Christ says to us: "Judge not, and you will not be judged." Let us not, therefore, try to know what passed in the heart of this unfortunate during his long and painful agony.

But, alas! have we not too often similar doubts in regard to poor beings whom death has surprised

in disbelief or disorder, and who, sometimes, were peculiarly dear to us? To Christians who have to suffer this sorrow, the most poignant of all, I consider it a sacred duty to propose motives of hope and principles of consolation.

"God," says St. Thomas Aquinas, "is so kind a Lord that He can diminish the punishment of crime, and even remit it entirely." And in another place he says: "God is absolutely free to pardon, as He wishes and when He wishes, a thing which they do not and cannot do who are subject to a higher law." Fénelon wrote to the Duke of Chevreuse, apropos of the death of his son: "We should not allow ourselves to fall into thoughts that are too afflicting..... God sees the clay of which we are made, and pities His poor children..... God needs neither time nor speech to make Himself heard and understood..."

Father Faber, in his book entitled *Creator and Creature*, says: "The wonders of God's love accumulate around a death-bed a hundred times more than we see, a hundred times more than we believe..... This last hour can explain many otherwise inexplicable salvations."

Finally, here are admirable pages written by an illustrious religious whom no one ever accused of laxity, and whose memory, on the contrary, is universally esteemed; I speak of Father Ravignan:

“At the last moment of life, on the threshold of eternity, doubtless there pass in the soul divine mysteries of justice, but above all there occur mysteries of mercy and love: *Superexaltat misericordia judicium.*”

On the occasion of the tragic death of the Duke of Orleans, the holy religious wrote to one of the maids-of-honor of Queen Marie-Amélie :

“The sorrow of a mother is the most august and venerable of all sorrows; and therefore should we not believe that it is the most powerful over the heart of God?

“We could not, it is true, penetrate the secrets of His mercy; we cannot know or say what happens in the last moments of a cruel and mysterious agony; but since we are Christians, placed under the law of hope no less than that of faith and love, we should elevate ourselves ceaselessly from the depths of our sorrow to the thought of the infinite goodness of the Saviour.

“There is no barrier, no insurmountable obstacle placed in this world between grace and the soul, as long as a spark of life remains. We should, therefore, always hope, and address to the Saviour humble and persevering entreaties. One cannot say to what an extent they will be heard. Great saints and doctors have gone very far in speaking of the powerful efficacy of these prayers for our

dear friends, whatever may have been their death. We shall know one day these ineffable marvels of divine mercy ; we should never cease to implore it. I always love to picture God as the most compassionate and tender of mothers ; what a mother, eminently worthy of the name, has so ardently desired for her son at his last moment, God has desired for him more ardently still. I put myself into the hands of his all-powerful love."

Père de Ponlevoy, the biographer of Père Ravignan, adds : " In fact, he loved to speak of the miracles of grace which, he believed, take place at the moment of death ; and his feeling seems to have been that a great number of sinners are converted at their last moments, and die reconciled with God." *

NOTE II.

All souls are not, unfortunately, capable of heroism in the presence of death, and it is necessary, sometimes, to spare their weakness. From this point of view, I believe it is useful to reproduce here some pages of the beautiful introduction written by Père Pététot, Superior of the

* *Life of Père Ravignan by Père de Ponlevoy*, pp. 244 and 245.

Oratory, in the beginning of the *Journée des Malades*, of abbé Perreyve:

“Have you never been witnesses of the cruel situation in which a family finds itself around a sick person, when the physician declares that there is no longer any resource or hope, and when, on his part, the invalid does not even suspect the gravity of his state? They wish to make him receive the last sacraments; they would like, however, to keep from him all sorrowful emotions and, consequently, to hide from him the sad truth. What is to be done? How shall this grievous problem be solved? We feel then anguishes, the more terrible the longer that they have put off the solemn question, and that the moments are becoming more precious. I wish to say, nevertheless, as an encouragement to fulfill this sacred duty, that people exaggerate the dangers they fear from it. I can declare that, during a long ministry, I cannot recall a single case where its consequences were regrettable. It is not the less true that these fears and terrors exist, and that it is customary to consider the performance of this duty as one of the most cruel missions. . . . But, dear invalids, if as soon as you become seriously ill, you yourselves take the initiative, and ask for the visit of a priest, you spare your family the most sorrowful of situations. But it is

not only the anguish of your families that I wish to spare: I desire also to treat your weakness kindly. . . Are you afraid of death? Do not hesitate to tell me the truth.—Well, yes, I am afraid of it, and I fear that I shall be more afraid of it when it will come. . .—Would you prefer to allow it come to you without your being informed of its presence? In a word, would you wish to die without knowing it, and still without endangering the salvation of your soul?—Do not answer me, it is useless; I understand you; that is what you desire. I cannot hide from you that it is not what I wish for myself and I beg God to change your dispositions. Nevertheless, if you persevere in them, imperfect as they are, they are not incompatible with salvation. Do what I advise: go to confession and communion as soon as you perceive that you are seriously ill, and if your malady is prolonged, receive them; also from time to time as a consolation; in this way, whatever may happen, you will be prepared. If death approaches, you will know nothing of it, you will not see it, you will not hear it; they will tell you nothing about it, and your desires will be satisfied without your eternity being compromised. I cannot conceal from you, however, that by these yieldings to a great weakness, you deprive yourself of the merits of the greatest and noblest sacrifice that

man can make of himself to God, the sacrifice of his life."

Père Gratry himself would exhort Christians to take a more virile attitude, when he wrote in his *Méditations inédites* :

" Still, man is not a coward, but a generous and sublime creature, the only one that can die with consciousness and liberty. Only teach men to die and they will learn it."

EPILOGUE.

The introduction placed at the beginning of this volume, which I dated the nineteenth of February, 1880, ended in these words :

“I thank God that He has permitted the author of these *Meditations* to write and to publish a book which, I know, he has wished to make the last testament of his laborious and fruitful apostolate.”

Alas ! I did not think that I spoke so truly. He who has summed up in these pages a number of discourses delivered by him on Holy Thursday in Paris, was at this time in the full activity of life and work. Neither his age nor his health gave me any presentiment of his approaching end. On the contrary, I anticipated for him a career in which he would enlarge his power to do good, and in the autumn of his years gather a multiplied harvest for the granaries of his Heavenly Master.

But God disposed otherwise. Hardly had this beloved brother entered upon his sixty-second year, when he himself had to come face to face with that dreadful mystery of death, for which he had wished to prepare his hearers and himself by

meditating, both in his sermons and his book, upon the words of the Saviour expiring on the Cross.

With what courageous simplicity did he prepare himself to cross "the gloomy and terrifying passage;" in what sentiments of faith, of confidence and of trust, did he in the fullness of his freedom give up his soul into the hands of his Creator; how very meek and strong he showed himself to consummate his sacrifice, uniting himself to the sentiments, the dispositions and the prayers of Jesus crucified; what an inestimable grace was accorded to him of being able to preach to souls and lavish upon them the sollicitude of his zeal, in the very arms of death and in the midst of the most grievous assaults of the last agony; what place, in fine, in the preoccupations of his last moments, was held by the sick, the lowly, the poor and the afflicted to whom he had always ardently desired to be the faithful imitator of mercy *par excellence*, is not unknown to those who from near and far have mourned him with me.

All these things have been said, and excellently said, by the soul of a priest and the heart of a friend,*

* M. l'abbé Planus, vicar general of Autun : *La Mort et les Funérailles de l'abbé Chas. Perraud*.

I also desire to thank M. l'abbé Bernard, Father Lallemand of the Oratory, M. l'abbé Chapon, M. l'abbé Lacroix, et M. Chapusot, for the touching notices they consecrated to the memory of the dear departed.

in the pages on which many tears have already fallen, and which continue in a very efficacious way the beneficent ministry of the apostle who has entered into the silence and eternal repose of death.

Why then should I add this epilogue to a book to which a large number of souls are indebted for an increase of enlightning faith and of supernatural courage in the darkness and difficulties of life?

It is because this edition (the sixth) gives me the opportunity of saying publicly how, in the midst of my great grief, I have had the still greater consolation of having before my eyes, for several days, the true, decisive, irresistible commentary on the encouraging teachings contained in this book of meditations.

They often speak in this end of the century of books that are practiced before they are written.

In this case it is the great function of death, of which it is question on nearly every page; which has been experienced, practiced and accomplished by a preacher of the Gospel in the very same conditions that he had tried to make prominent to his hearers, so as to make them understand, admire, and taste its austere and ideal beauty.

Therefore, I believe that I can apply to the author of these *Meditations* the beautiful reflections of St. Augustine on the holy bishop of Carthage, Cyprian :

“The words of the doctor had revealed in advance the soul of the martyr. He practiced in his death what he taught in his life.” *

There we have, if I do not deceive myself, what has impressed on this book the deep character, the indelible seal of the most absolute sincerity.

These discourses are not merely eloquent and pathetic exhortations to acquit oneself well of the duty of dying. By the mercy of God, he who delivered them, and who besides ever had a dislike for conventional rhetoric and for thoughtless and frigid phrases, has performed in all its details the ritual he had indicated for a noble, courageous, Christian death, “the true prelude of the triumph of the soul and of immortality.” †

During the last days of his life, having asked of his own accord, before the danger became menacing, to receive from my hands the Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction, he wished to listen to the reading of the meditations, and particularly of that one which is consecrated to the last word of the dying Saviour: “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”

What this office of fraternal and sacerdotal charity was to me, with how sharp a sword did I, at

* Ut in verbis doctoris prænoscetur animus martyr. Hoc fecit in morte quod in vita docuit.—*Sermons of St. Augustine*, 319, in St. Cyprian, martyr, No. 6.

† Le Père Lacordaire, 8th *Conférence*, t. 1. p. 162.

certain moments, feel my whole being pierced, when I compared internally what the preacher had said in the full possession of health and life, with what I saw him accomplish before my eyes: I do not venture to write.

At the most difficult times, when despite all my efforts, sobs choked my utterance, it was he who said to me with a great calmness: "Courage, courage!" And, after some moments, I recovered strength to continue.

Yes, indeed, we, the witnesses of these never to be forgotten scenes, have seen him "dispose everything beforehand, preside in person over the ordering of this impressive journey, of this voyage whence no one returns."*

Verily he has made us see in what way a Christian "ought to restore his soul to Him who created it and who asks us for it, as a friend after a long absence looks for the return of his friend."†

Yes, following the beautiful comparison with which he was inspired in the first and last pages of his book, the words of Jesus on the cross have been for him "a celestial melody which soothed his sorrows, mitigated his agony, charmed his death."‡

* Page 152.

† Page 144.

‡ Pages 27, 141.

“United to Jesus Christ he had no longer terror and desolation for companions, but filial confidence and invincible hope.”*

I write these lines at the close of a glorious summer day. The sun seems to descend slowly behind the peaks of Morvan and of our Mt. Beuvray. His rays empurple the stately forests that crown our Eduan mountain and beam upon the village that recalls to our mind the heroic devotion of Saint Leger. How many times, during Charles’ sojourns in Autun, did we contemplate together this spectacle which carries with it such lessons of religion!

Attentive, impressed, silent, we would stand looking at the apparent disappearance of the fiery globe, and its descent into the waves of the distant ocean. We would make an application of this to the drama of death, to those solemn moments which speed the course of men travelling from time to eternity. Sometimes even we would chance to repeat or to chant this admirable strophe from one of our ancient liturgical hymns:

*O quando luceret tuus,
Qui nescit occasum dies?
O quando sancta se dabit,
Quæ nescit hostem patriam.†*

* Page 20.

† “When shall we see the light of the day that knows no night? When shall we obtain a fatherland that knows no foe?”—*Hymn for Compline from the ancient French Breviary.*

On Monday the eighteenth of January, 1892, at seven o'clock in the evening, clasped in my arms until the last sigh of his palpitating breast, renewing at every moment the oblation of his sacrifice, he left us, and I remembered the striking image by which he had described, in one of the companions of the crucified God, this "happy privileged favorite of Death, who, by a divine permission, instead of resting in the obscurity and coldness of night, when the sun has disappeared, would attach himself to it as an inseparable satellite, and find himself happy in another atmosphere, without having lost a single one of its rays." *

✠ ADOLPHE-LOUIS,
Bishop of Autun

Feast of the Assumption,
August 15, 1892.

* Page 56.

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